A Home Literacy Handbook for Parents With Preschool Children

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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to provide parents with an awareness of the role that they play in their preschool children's literacy and reading development and to create a practical handbook that parents can use to teach early literacy and reading skills to their preschool children in their home environment. The handbook was created in response to the literature that confirmed that the children benefit from developing emergent literacy skills before they enter school in kindergarten or grade 1. In addition to the information gathered from the academic literature, needs assessments were conducted in order to hear perspectives from multiple stakeholders involved in the context of this project. The needs assessment questionnaires were conducted with 4 Ontario certified grade 1 and 2 teachers, and 4 parents with preschool children or children in kindergarten or grade 1. Data collected from these participants highlighted the needs of parents and were used to create a comprehensive handbook that will hopefully be accessible and useful to a wide parent audience. The results of the research project indicated that parents would, in fact, benefit from having access to a resource such as this handbook to assist in teaching the 4 components of emergent literacy to their preschool children—oral language, alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and print awareness—to their preschool children.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

This project involved the development of a handbook for parents of preschool children, providing them with practical resources and activities to use in promoting literacy and reading for their preschool children in the home environment. Children develop a foundation for literacy in the preschool years, and it is during this time that they learn basic emergent language and literacy skills, defined as the basic skills, attitudes, and knowledge that children have in the early stages of reading which will assist them when they enter formal education settings (Morrow, 2001). As found by many researchers (Compton-Lilly & Greene, 2011; Morrow, 2011; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998; Strickland & Taylor, 1989), the home environment plays a very important role in providing children with their first encounters with language and literacy. It was noted by the International Reading Association (2002) that family involvement in a child's education is a greater factor in student success than family income or parents' education. Therefore, it is important that parents become aware of their role in providing their children with practical opportunities to develop early literacy and reading skills in the home environment. A resource for parents, such as this handbook, would be one way for parents to develop this awareness and access practical activities to use in the home environment.

Background of the Problem

The literacy skills that a person develops play a crucial role in the participation and functionality of individuals in society and in the economy (Sen, 1999). Individuals with well-developed literacy skills may be expected to obtain better employment, receive higher earnings, assist the productivity of the economy, and be able to adapt to new technologies being used today (Green & Riddell, 2007). However, results from the

Programme for International Student Assessment in 2009 found that 1 in 10 Canadian students aged 15 performed at a low reading level (below level 2) and lacked fundamental skills to prepare them to either enter the workforce or pursue postsecondary education (Statistics Canada, 2010).When looking specifically at students in Ontario, results from the reading assessment portion of the grade 3 Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) test in 2011–2012 demonstrate that 66% of students are performing at or above the provincial standard (levels 3 and 4), while 34% of grade 3 students are not achieving the provincial standard in reading (Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2012a). In addition, when comparing students' reading achievements from grade 3 to grade 6 (from 2009 to 2012), it was found that 19% of students who were unable to meet the provincial standards in grade 3 also did not meet the standards in grade 6 (Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2012a). Furthermore, the results from the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test in 2011–2012 demonstrate that of the 137,022 grade 10 students who wrote the OSSLT for the first time, 82% were successful and 18% of students were unsuccessful (Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2012b).

These statistics are problematic because they demonstrate that there is a fair-sized proportion of students in Canada and specifically Ontario, approximately 20% of students, who have limited reading abilities in grade 3, in grade 6, and in grade 10. This finding is critical because it supports research stating that children who struggle with reading at a young age tend to continue struggling throughout their years in school (National Research Council, 1998; B. M. Phillips & Lonigan, 2009; Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal, 2005; Torgesen, 2005). These results from EQAO demonstrate the importance

in developing children's reading and literacy skills early in life so that children can grow up as successful readers with adequate literacy skills in elementary school, secondary school, and in the workforce.

Statement of the Problem Context

Elementary school teachers play a role in helping children gain literacy skills and learn how to read; however parents also play an important role in providing opportunities for the development of the early stages of language, literacy, and reading in the home before children go to school (Huebner & Payne, 2010; Kirby & Hogan, 2008; Korat, Klein, & Segal-Drori, 2007). Burgess (2011) found that in the United States of America there is a divide between the knowledge of literacy and reading-related skills that some grade 1 children have compared to others entering grade 1. Some children enter school with a sufficient amount of knowledge about reading and literacy, while other children do not have even basic reading and literacy skills (Ezell & Justice, 2005). It is problematic for children who do not receive any reading and literacy instruction at home before entering school because children in grades 1 to 3 who struggle with reading are at a serious disadvantage compared to their peers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). The situation is exacerbated when parents do not have knowledge about how to provide literacy support for their children. Weigel, Martin, and Bennett (2005) emphasize that knowledge of literacy practices by parents plays an important role in children's literacy development. In addition, research demonstrates that children who develop successful early reading skills tend to remain successful readers in later years, whereas children who struggle when learning to read tend to continue experiencing problems in reading

throughout all their years in school (National Research Council, 1998; B. M. Phillips & Lonigan, 2009; Roberts et al., 2005; Torgesen, 2005).

While grade 1 educators teach students a variety of early language, reading, and literacy skills, it is clear when looking at the research (Huebner & Payne, 2010; Storch & Whitehurst, 2001) that a home environment that promotes literacy before the preschool child enters school can have significant positive influences on the child's education in years to follow. More specifically, the early connections between emergent literacy skills, the home environment, and language are important for achievement in later years (Storch & Whitehurst, 2001). For example, the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth found that children who were read to several times a day between ages 2 and 3 did measurably better in kindergarten than those children who were not read to as often by their parents at home (Lipps & Yiptong-Avila, 1999).

In addition, a document published by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2003), titled *Early Reading Strategy*, highlights the importance of a rich home literacy environment. An important factor when learning to read is exposure to an environment that promotes language and literacy, containing rich conversations, age-appropriate books, storytelling, and the encouragement to pose and answer questions (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Moreover, parents have a large role in the development of their preschool children's literacy and reading ability, and it is essential that they are able to provide a home environment that promotes and effectively develops their children's literacy and reading skills.

Purpose of the Research Project

The purpose of this project was twofold: (a) to provide parents with an awareness of the importance of the role that they play in their preschool children's literacy and reading development; and (b) to construct a practical, useful, parent-friendly, and meaningful handbook for parents with preschool children containing strategies, lessons, and activities to assist them in providing rich home literacy experiences to their preschool children. Through the development of this handbook, the hope is that parents will gain accessible strategies to help them take an active role in their children's early literacy and reading development. Providing children with these learning opportunities at home will prepare them with skills that will be further developed once they enter school in kindergarten and grade 1.

Research Questions

The goal of this handbook was to promote awareness to parents about the importance of a rich home literacy environment and to provide practical activities and strategies to parents so they will be able to foster a home environment that promotes literacy development. Through the development of this handbook, the following research questions were addressed:

- What literacy and reading skills should preschool children have to meet the expected reading and literacy levels for kindergarten and grade 1?
- What are effective literacy and reading activities that parents can use in the home environment to promote reading and literacy development in their preschool children?

Rationale

My personal experiences working with children in the junior grades have demonstrated to me the importance of literacy development occurring at an early age. As I have learned through my experiences, once children struggle with reading it can be difficult to help them develop their reading and literacy skills when have reached the junior grades. I believe that early recognition and support of early literacy development in the home environment is crucial. This is where children are able to receive early literacy and reading instruction during their preschool years. My hope is that this handbook will be helpful for parents in providing them with a resource that can be utilized to teach their preschool children early reading and literacy skills at home.

A practical resource, such as this handbook, provides parents with knowledge about early literacy activities and strategies. It also provides them with the tools needed to implement these activities into their home in a way that benefits their children and prepares them with early literacy and reading skills that will be further developed in kindergarten and grade 1. Children's early development of literacy is extremely important, as the early literacy skills that they develop transfer throughout their years in school and into their lives and careers after school. In order to expect that parents will be able to provide their preschool children with learning experiences and activities involving literacy, parents must be educated about strategies to teach early literacy. Providing parents with a resource, such as this handbook, is one way to give parents practical strategies, activities, and methods of teaching early literacy activities in the home environment.

This handbook will be a beneficial resource for parents, preschool child care workers, primary teachers, and children themselves. Through using specific strategies and activities in this practical handbook, parents will be able to work towards creating a home environment that promotes the development of emergent literacy skills in their preschool children. Emergent literacy skills, also frequently referred to as early literacy skills, can be defined as the basic knowledge, attitudes, and skills such as letter knowledge, letter–sound knowledge, oral language, and awareness of print concepts that toddlers and children begin to learn in the early stages of reading and literacy development (Irwin, Moore, Tornatore, & Fowler, 2012; Zeece & Churchill, 2001).

Naturally, this resource intends to benefit children by promoting the development of a strong literacy base during their preschool years so that when they enter school they will be able to further develop their literacy skills through the instruction of the classroom teacher. Ultimately, the development of this handbook will make a contribution towards minimizing the number of children and adolescents in Ontario who struggle with reading and literacy by promoting rich literacy and reading experiences for children early in life. Primary teachers may also benefit from the handbook because it can provide them with an understanding of what literacy and reading activities parents are doing with their children in the home environment. Knowledge of this allows teachers to build their own classroom lessons in a way that complements and further develops the skills that children have already learned prior to entering school.

Theoretical Framework

The foundation for this project is based on Vygotsky's social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978b). Vygotsky's theory highlights the role of adults and the significance of

social interactions in providing support to children to move them from their actual developmental level to the zone of proximal development. It is in the zone of proximal development that children are provided with assistance and support in their learning, also called scaffolding, so that they are able to accomplish more of the learning that they are unable to do by themselves at their current developmental level (Vygotsky, 1978a).

The social constructivist theory is an important foundation for this project because it highlights the vital role that parents play in their preschool child's literacy and reading development. Similar to the teacher in a classroom setting, parents should be providing support to their child in the child's zone of proximal development. This support helps to scaffold the child's literacy development, allowing him or her to model the parent's behaviour and work through the learning with the parent. As the preschool child becomes more comfortable with the literacy skills, the parent slowly provides less support, in turn encouraging the child to move out of the zone of proximal development and into the independent level of development.

Scope and Limitations of the Project

A limitation in the process of developing the handbook for parents is the limited sample of parents and teachers consulted for the needs assessment. The activities and lessons in the handbook were based on the needs of a small number of participants, therefore potentially limiting the degree to which the handbook can be applied to a greater population. Second, the parents recruited for the needs assessment were clients from a reading centre. This presents a limitation to the handbook because these parents, who have brought their children to the reading centre, may have different attitudes towards literacy than other parents not involved in the needs assessment. Therefore, the

needs expressed by these parents may not be representative of the general population. In addition, the lessons and activities provided in this handbook may be difficult for parents whose first language is not English to comprehend and effectively utilize. These parents would certainly benefit from using a resource such as this handbook, and in the future it would be beneficial to create a handbook that is targeted for non-English-speaking parents to help develop their children's early literacy and reading skills.

Outline of Remainder of the Document

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature about Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, emergent literacy, the home literacy environment, and different types of reading instruction that can be used in the home.

Chapter Three outlines the research methods and procedures employed in the development of the home literacy handbook for parents. It explains the steps taken to develop and implement the needs assessment questionnaires, provides the summary from the needs assessments, and explains the process used in developing the home literacy handbook for parents as well as provides an overview of the handbook.

Chapter Four constitutes the handbook itself, *A Home Literacy Handbook for Parents With Preschool Children.*

Chapter Five provides a summary of the purpose of this major research paper, the key findings from the project, and a discussion about early literacy practices in the home environment. It also discusses the implications of the handbook and further recommendations for research on the topic of early literacy development in the home environment. This chapter concludes with final words from the author on home literacy practices with preschool children.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The development of literacy is an important skill for children to learn, both in school and in the home environment (Huebner & Payne, 2010). Learning literacy skills at a young age is beneficial for children to ensure that they will have the basic skills necessary to acquire the more complex literacy skills in late elementary school and high school (Storch & Whitehurst, 2001). A review of literature surrounding the topics of early literacy development and home literacy assists in demonstrating the various academic perspectives on these topics.

For the purpose of this project, the review of the literature involved an examination of the role that Vygotsky's social constructivist theory plays in parents' involvement in the home literacy environment. Next, the literature surrounding emergent literacy was examined in order to understand the early development of literacy and reading skills in preschool children. Thereafter, the literature on the home literacy environment including the various models and factors that contribute to a child's home literacy environment was explored. Finally, two forms of reading and literacy instruction—shared reading and dialogic reading—were discussed to demonstrate the specific areas of emergent literacy that can be developed when using these forms of instruction.

Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory

Vygotsky's social constructivist theory provides a practical framework for this project. The distinguishing factor between the home literacy environment and the school environment is the role that the parents play in the child's life. The social constructivist theory views learning as the process of being able to construct knowledge while

interacting with other people (Almasi & Garas-York, 2009). Moreover, social interactions are valuable for learning, and people learn effectively when working and learning with other people (Vygotsky, 1978b). More specifically, Vygotsky proposed an approach to learning explained as the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky (1978b) explains that the zone of proximal development is the distance between the child's actual development and the child's potential level of development that can be reached when being guided by parents or more capable peers.

In order to achieve learning in the zone of proximal development, the adult must be aware of the amount of support that is required to help cultivate the child's learning (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The support that is provided to children in the zone of proximal development is referred to as scaffolding. The scaffolds, or supports, provided to children allow them to observe, interact with more knowledgeable people (peers or adults), and therefore engage in cognitive processes that they may not be able to do by themselves (Vygotsky, 1978b). Moreover, the process of scaffolding provides learners with an opportunity to achieve more than if they were working by themselves on a task (Almasi & Garas-York, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978a). After the child has received appropriate supports from the adults, internalized the learning process, and truly learned the material by working with the adults, the supports are removed (Vygotsky, 1978a). This stage of the learning process allows children to apply their knowledge learned while in the zone of proximal development and use it in an independent manner (Vygotsky, 1978a).

Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (1978a, 1978b) is useful as a theoretical framework to explain the role that parents have in the home environment. There is widespread consensus in the literature that supports the involvement of parents

in preschool children's reading and literacy development (Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi, Cutting, 2006; Huebner & Payne, 2010; Whitehurst &Lonigan, 1998). According to Gallimore and Tharp (1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), good teaching occurs when assistance is provided to the students in the zone of proximal development to help foster their learning. Parents can also provide scaffolding to their preschool children in the form of literacy support if they are aware of the important emergent literacy skills and how to teach and develop these skills in the home environment. The following sections of the literature review explore the emergent literacy skills that children develop, home literacy environment, and different instructional strategies to teach early reading and literacy skills to children.

Emergent Literacy Skills

Emergent literacy skills are the basic skills, knowledge, and attitudes that infants, toddlers, and young children learn in the early stages of reading, prior to conventional literacy instruction (Irwin et al., 2012; Zeece & Churchill, 2001; Zucker, Ward, & Justice, 2009). These skills include knowledge of letter names, phonological awareness (the awareness of the sound structure of spoken words), the ability to rhyme, vocabulary knowledge, concepts of print (the understanding of the nature and uses of print), oral language (the act of speaking and listening), and understanding stories read aloud (Anthony, Williams, McDonald, & Francis, 2007; Haney & Hill, 2004; Irwin et al., 2012; Roberts et al., 2005; S. S. Stahl & Yaden, 2004). According to research by Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998), oral language, phonological awareness, and print knowledge are the major components of a strong emergent literacy foundation. It has been found that

emergent literacy skills are predictors of reading comprehension abilities, decoding skills, and writing for school-aged children (Anthony et al., 2007; Roberts et al., 2005).

Components of Emergent Literacy

The literature identifies the major components of emergent literacy as oral language, alphabet knowledge, phonological processing abilities, and print awareness.

Oral language has been discovered by researchers to be an important component of emergent literacy as well as a strong predictor for future literacy acquisition and reading achievement for children (Flynn, 2011; Saracho & Spodek, 2007; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Trehearne, Healy, & Cantalini-Williams, 2005). Oral language can be explained as the spoken aspect of language that can be heard, interpreted, and understood (Haney & Hill, 2004). Oral language incorporates both the act of speaking (expressive language) as well as listening (receptive language; Flynn, 2011). The development of oral language is an essential skill for children to have because it not only supports learning in the future classrooms, but it is also critical to literacy development that is essential all throughout life (Trehearne et al., 2005). Social interaction is an essential aspect due to the nature and process of oral language (Flynn, 2011). The characteristics of oral language include syntax (grammar and sentence structure), phonology (sounds), vocabulary, discourse (using a variety of contexts and texts to gain meaning), and pragmatics (meaning; Hill & Launder, 2010; Snow et al., 1998). The combination of these five characteristics is critical for the development of children's oral language.

Alphabet knowledge is an essential skill for children to learn when developing emergent literacy (Irwin et al., 2012; Jones, Clark, & Reutzel, 2013). Alphabet knowledge is considered to be a constrained skill; thus there are a definitive number of

elements, or letters, to be learned (Paris, 2005). Therefore, learning the alphabet is a skill that can be completely mastered by children; once they have a knowledge of all of the letters (both uppercase and lowercase), are able to recognize the letters, and know the sounds associated with the letters, they have mastered the alphabetic system of their language (Drouin, Horner, & Sondergeld, 2012). In order for children to be able to read and write, they must first have a foundational knowledge of the individual letters of the alphabet (Irwin et al., 2012; Trehearne et al., 2005). Moreover, alphabet knowledge is a strong predictor of children's later literacy achievement, with specific focus on decoding, comprehension, and spelling (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008).

Research demonstrates that phonological processing abilities correspond with children's emergent literacy skills (Anthony et al., 2007). Phonological processing abilities are defined as the sound structures of oral language used to process both oral and written language (Anthony et al., 2007). More specifically, phonological awareness refers to the sensitivity to sound units of language, such as syllables, phonemes (the smallest sound unit), and rhymes, and the ability to manipulate the sound units (Lonigan, Burgess, Anthony & Barker, 1998; Snow et al., 1998). Examples of phonological awareness include the child's ability to determine the syllables that are building blocks of words, the ability to identify and manipulate individual letter sounds such as /s/, /a/, and /t/, and being able to identify words that have the repetition of a similar sound at the end of the word in order to create a rhyme.

Print awareness has been found to be a contributor to emergent literacy. Print awareness refers to the forms, functions, and conventions of print (Lefebvre, Trudeau, & Sutton, 2011). Specific skills that are associated with print awareness include knowing

how to handle books properly, being aware of environmental print, having an understanding that print contains meaning, being familiar with book elements such as the title, cover, and author, et cetera, and knowing the letters of the alphabet (Lefebvre et al., 2011). Using print referencing techniques while reading is one strategy that can be used to improve print awareness (Lefebvre et al., 2011; Zucker et al., 2009). Print referencing allows the adult to draw the child's attention to the print, using both verbal and nonverbal referencing techniques, in order to highlight the forms, functions, and features of the print (Zucker et al., 2009). More specifically, print referencing includes using verbal referencing such as asking questions, requesting the child to interact with the print, and making comments on the print, as well as nonverbal referencing such a pointing to the print (Zucker et al., 2009). The main goal of using print referencing is to engage the child in conversations about the print, therefore assisting to develop metalinguistic awareness (the ability to acknowledge spoken or written language as an object of attention; Zucker et al., 2009).

The Emergent Literacy Perspective

According to Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998), the term emergent literacy refers to the stage when children begin to develop literacy and reading skills in a progressive manner prior to entering the formal school system. During this stage, children begin to develop a knowledge base of literacy and reading skills and continually build on their learning experiences through receiving exposure and interactions with language and printed literacy materials to prepare them for formal learning in school (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). The emergent literacy perspective on reading proposes the idea that all of the literacy-related activities that infants, toddlers,

and preschool children participate in are important contributors to literacy development (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). In addition, emergent literacy acknowledges that the early development of reading, writing, and oral language is learned in a variety of different social contexts rather than in strictly formal instruction settings (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

As concluded by Senechal and LeFevre (2002), emergent literacy skills are gained when children are involved in formal literacy experiences, such as when parents directly teach them how to read and print words, the knowledge of letter names, and letter sounds (Haney & Hill, 2004). Haney and Hill (2004) also assert that direct parental teaching of literacy skills is a valuable aspect necessary for developing emergent literacy skills in preschool-aged children. In addition, various researchers have found that reading aloud to children is an important activity for building early emergent reading skills (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Mem, 2001; Zucker et al., 2009). Read-alouds involving print referencing or calling the child's attention to print using verbal or nonverbal referencing are beneficial literacy activities because they teach the child about print while leading into an endless number of activities that focus on specific skills or concepts related to the book (Zucker, et al., 2009). Trehearne et al. (2005) support this finding by explaining that reading aloud to children is one of the most important activities that parents can do with children to build children's knowledge and skills necessary when learning to read. In addition, book reading between the parent and child, opportunities for verbal interaction, and verbal and nonverbal print referencing between the parent and child can make positive contributions to the child's emergent literacy skills (Ezell & Justice, 2005).

More specifically, Bennett, Weigel, and Martin (2002) found that interactive activities between the parents and children such as singing songs, reciting rhymes, and telling stories assist in developing emergent literacy in children. Finally, Korat et al. (2007) discovered that children's emergent literacy was typically greater when they had higher levels of socioeconomic status, family home literacy environments, and maternal mediation levels (the parent's level of discussion that occurs while interacting with the child during reading and activities).

Parental Beliefs and Literacy Practices

Some factors which can influence children's emergent literacy include parents' literacy levels, literacy habits, parental beliefs about reading, as well as the literacy activities that parents and children participate in together (Weigel et al., 2005). Parents are able to have a positive influence or negative influence on the home literacy environment depending on their personal beliefs towards literacy and reading and the role that they play in their child's literacy development. For example, parents who believe that their child does not need to learn how to read before starting school, do not attempt to provide support to their children, or do not invest their own time in reading may create negative and literacy-impoverished environments for their children (Grieshaber, Shield, Luke, & Macdonald, 2011). This negativity can often create an atmosphere where it is easy for children to develop a disinterest towards reading.

On the other hand, researchers (Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan, 2002; Snow et al., 1998) illustrate that the parents' personal literacy levels, literacy habits, and their participation in literacy activities with their children can be associated with the positive development of the child's literacy and language skills. The study by Weigel et al. (2005)

concluded that parents who engaged their children in literacy activities were the parents who also emphasized the importance of their children's literacy development and who believed that their role in this development was important. Therefore, parents who engage their children in literacy activities and have positive attitudes towards reading are able to create an atmosphere where children develop enthusiasm and interest towards literacy and reading at an early age (Weigel et al., 2005). The influences of parental beliefs and literacy practices on children's literacy development will be further discussed in the section on the Home Literacy Environments.

Emergent Literacy Processes

Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) propose a model stating that emergent literacy and conventional literacy consist of two interdependent processes and skills: outside-in processes, and inside-out processes. Outside-in skills describe the children's understanding of the context in which the words they are learning to read occurs. This includes the child's prior knowledge of the world, knowledge of semantics (the meaning of the words), knowledge of the conventions of print (e.g., left-to-right and front-to-back orientation), narrative understanding skills, knowledge surrounding the context in which the sentence occurs, and ultimately reading comprehension abilities of specific words and texts (B. M. Phillips & Lonigan, 2009; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

On the other hand, inside-out skills represent the different rules that the child must know when learning to read sounds and words. The inside-out processes require decoding and foundational skills of knowing graphemes (letter–name knowledge), phonemes (knowledge of sounds), and understanding links between them (the phoneme–grapheme correspondence); syntactic awareness (knowledge of punctuation and grammar);

decoding capabilities (applying knowledge of letter–sound relationships to be able to correctly pronounce written words); and phonological awareness which includes the knowledge of rhymes and the manipulation of syllables and phonemes (B. M. Phillips & Lonigan, 2009; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). The combination and interaction between the outside-in and inside-out processes are imperative for successful reading to occur in beginning readers.

Storch and Whitehurst (2001) studied the differences between outside-in and inside-out domains of emergent literacy during the preschool period. Their findings demonstrated that knowledge of print and phonological awareness is related to the inside-out skills, whereas oral vocabulary develops with the outside-in skills. This study also found that different aspects of the home literacy environment affect outside-in and inside-out skills. For example, shared reading primarily affects outside-in skills because it is found to assist in the development of oral vocabulary and semantics, whereas exposure to alphabet materials, rhyming, and word–sound games primarily affect the development of inside-out skills (Storch & Whitehurst, 2001).

Socioeconomic Status

Research indicates that the development of children's emergent literacy skills can differ depending on the parents' socioeconomic status (SES; B. M. Phillips & Lonigan, 2009). Socioeconomic status is usually measured by the family income, occupation, and the maternal or paternal educational qualifications (Hartas, 2011; Kirby & Hogan, 2008). The findings of a study by Brooker (2002) indicate that the beliefs towards the purpose of literacy, the ways in which children are believed to acquire knowledge in early childhood, and ways for children to develop literacy skills vary amongst different social

groups. Research indicates that there is a significant gap in the emergent literacy skills between children who come from lower SES backgrounds and children who come from higher SES homes with more educated parents (Lonigan et al., 1998; B. M. Phillips & Lonigan, 2009). This gap is problematic because it has been commonly found that children who are behind their peers in early reading development typically remain behind, even with the assistance of remedial or intervention efforts (B. M. Phillips & Lonigan, 2009). Variability in the home environment has been found to be an important explanation for some of the differences in emergent literacy among varying SES.

Multiple studies (Burgess et al., 2002; Leseman & de Jong, 1998) have found that the frequency with which parents participate in shared reading activities with their children vary among the different social classes. For example, when comparing parents who live above the poverty line to those parents who are from a lower SES, Hartas (2011) found that 65.8% of higher SES parents read with their 3-year-old children every day, whereas only 45.4% of lower SES parents read to their 3-year-old children every day. This study also found a similar difference between the mothers' education level—78.8% of mothers with a degree level education read to their 3-year-old children every day, while only 33.1% of mothers without any educational qualifications spent time every day reading to 3-year-olds (Hartas, 2011). The findings from the study by Hartas also indicate that children with parents from a higher SES (degree level or vocational equivalent) were typically 6 months ahead in literacy and language compared to other children whose parents lacked any educational qualifications. In regards to the interaction and mediation between the mother and child during the reading time, it has been found that children from families with high SES have higher emergent literacy levels, richer

literacy environments, and the parents were more involved during the reading (Korat et al., 2007). On the other hand, Korat et al. (2007) found that the children from low SES homes demonstrated lower emergent literacy levels, and the parents' mediation, discussion, and connections to the real world while reading the text were less developed.

While it has been discussed that low SES families do not participate in reading with their children as frequently as those from higher SES backgrounds, this cannot be assumed for all low SES families. It is important to note that there are many parents from low SES backgrounds who do successfully provide a supportive and enriched home learning environment for their children, despite limited education and income (Christian, Morrison, & Bryant, 1998; Drummond & Stipek, 2004). B. M. Phillips and Lonigan (2009) found that the relationship between SES and reading behaviours is highly complex. There are a variety of factors that play into the relationship between socioeconomic status, a child's emergent literacy development, and the home learning environment that parents provide to their children.

Home Literacy Environments

It has been well documented that children's home environments play an important role in providing them with their first encounters with language and literacy (Burgess, 2011; Burgess et al., 2002; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Senechal et al., 1998). The home literacy environment is defined as encompassing variables such as the variety of reading resources in the home, verbal references to literacy, library use, the opportunities provided to children to engage in these resources, and the parental attitudes, abilities, and skills in regards to literacy, parental modeling of literacy behaviours, and resources that influence the children's participation in literacy learning at home (Burgess et al., 2002; B.

M. Phillips & Lonigan, 2009; Senechal et al., 1998; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Other characteristics such as family income, parental literacy level, and literacy habits, as well as the engagement that occurs between the parent and child have been found to be related to children's development of literacy and language skills in the home (Burgess et al., 2002; Snow et al., 1998).

Many studies have documented that the home literacy environment correlates with the development of children's letter knowledge, oral language, phonological sensitivity, and interest in literacy (Burgess et al., 2002; Bus, van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002; Weigel et al., 2005). Research demonstrates that while the home literacy environment plays an important role in introducing language and literacy to children, there are different components of the home environment that can influence different learning outcomes for children (Burgess, 2011; Burgess et al., 2002; Grieshaber et al., 2011). For example, numerous studies found that young children's oral language, phonological sensitivity, letter–sound knowledge, and word decoding abilities were correlated with the frequency of the shared book reading between the parent and child (Burgess, 2011; Burgess et al., 2002; Senechal et al., 1998; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). On the other hand, studies also found that children's alphabet knowledge was associated with the parents' demographic characteristics and the activities used to explicitly teach literacy skills (Burgess et al., 2011; Senechal et al., 1998; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Studies demonstrate that the quality and supportiveness of the home environment, parents' beliefs, and the value of literacy and book reading are positively correlated with the development of preschool children's emergent literacy abilities (Bennett et al., 2002;

Burgess, 2011; Senechal et al., 1998). Looking specifically at the development of emergent literacy, it has been found that the frequency of shared reading between the child and parent have a positive effect on the preschool children's oral language development (Frijters, Barron, & Brunello, 2000). In addition to the time that parents spend reading with children, other verbal interactions between parents and children contribute to the development of emergent literacy and language skills. For example, activities done in the home such as reciting rhymes, singing songs, telling stories, drawing pictures, and playing games helped to improve children's language and literacy skills (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997; Snow et al., 1998; Weigel et al., 2005).

Kirby and Hogan (2008) point out that home literacy environments are important for the development of children's literacy for the following three reasons. First, a culture of reading where the skills of reading are seen as valuable and desirable can be established by exposing children to books in the home' therefore sparking the child's interest in reading. Second, a home literacy environment that emphasizes literacy and oral activities may contribute to children's emergent or preliteracy skills, such as phonological processing. Third, the home environment can also provide children with skills essential in learning to read, such as letter knowledge, word decoding, and word recognition.

Senechal et al. (1998) argued that children are exposed to two different types of literacy experiences in their home literacy environments: informal literacy and formal literacy. Informal literacy experiences, as defined by Senechal et al., are the literacy activities that focus on the message found within the text but not necessarily the text itself. For example, when parents read a bedtime story to the child, the focus may be on the illustrations as well as the meaning and story behind text. In these types of literacy

activities the child is being exposed to print and text, but because the focus is not on the print itself but rather the content within the text, the exposure is considered to be informal (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). Research demonstrates that informal literacy activities may not be sufficient predictors of the development of children's specific emergent literacy skills such as alphabet knowledge or early decoding (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002).

On the other hand, home literacy environments can also contain formal literacy activities where the parent and child are focusing explicitly on the print and text (Senechal et al., 1998). An example of a formal activity would be the parent reading an alphabet book to the child; the parent is focusing on print by talking about the letters and sounds explicitly with the child (Senechal et al., 1998). The teaching is purposeful, and the main focus of the literacy experience is to use the text as a means of teaching literacy skills. Therefore, more formal literacy activities appear to be a better way of assisting children in developing specific emergent literacy skills in their home environment.

Various researchers have looked closely at the home literacy environment, each constructing slightly different models of the home literacy environment (HLE) and how it influences literacy skills. First, Burgess et al. (2002) categorized the home literacy environments into three types of environments: limiting, passive, and active, and any combinations of the three. This model by Burgess et al. has a similar framework to an older home literacy environment model proposed by Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill (1991). In comparison to the updated categories including the limiting, passive, and active home environments defined by Burgess et al (2002), Snow et al. examined the home environment in terms of the family as educator model, the resilient family model, and the parent–school partnership model. Snow et al.'s three categories

considered different ways in which the involvement and interaction between parents and children in the home environment corresponds with the children's reading achievement. While Snow et al.'s models propose effective ways to examine the contribution of the family to the child's literacy development, Burgess et al.'s HLE model is more current, and thus more relevant to today's families.

Burgess et al.'s (2002) limiting home literacy environment category was labelled based on family's social class factors such as the education and occupations of the parents and specific parental characteristics such as their attitudes towards education, reading ability, and language. Limiting home literacy environments were associated with a lower achievement level of children's letter knowledge, oral language, phonological sensitivity, and reading skills (Burgess et al., 2002). Passive home literacy environments reflect the indirect or accidental learning that may occur in the home, such as children seeing parents reading the newspaper or watching noneducational television. In a passive home literacy environment there is minimal to no direct teaching of literacy skills occurring between the parent and child (Burgess et al., 2002). Any learning experience that the child encounters is based entirely from the child's observations rather than from explicit and purposeful teaching about literacy skills.

Active home literacy environments, on the other hand, reflect the direct and purposeful learning that occurs in the home. The active HLE is defined by the active engagement between parents and children in meaningful and purposeful literacy activities such as shared reading, discussion of books, and games involving letters, rhymes, and sounds that are specifically designed to develop children's language and literacy skills (Burgess et al., 2002). Senechal et al. (1998) found that supportive home literacy

environments that contain rich language, a variety of print resources, and time spent reading books to children assist in developing children's emergent literacy.

On the other hand, DeBaryshe (1995) and Weigel et al. (2005) proposed similar updated categories for the home literacy environments in hopes to gain a greater understanding of the ecological influences that affect preschool children's literacy skills and emerging language. DeBaryshe's model consisted of four key components of the home literacy environment to assist in the development of children's language skills: parental literacy habits, parental demographics, parental reading beliefs, and parent–child activities. Similarly, the categories in Weigel et al.'s model consisted of parental demographics, parental literacy habits, parental activities, and parental reading beliefs. The four categories of Weigel et al.'s model were designed to replace the limiting, passive, and active terms used by Burgess et al. (2002) in order to provide more clear descriptions of the home literacy environment in their study.

The results from both DeBaryshe (1995) and Weigel et al. (2005) confirmed that parental literacy habits, parental demographics, and parental reading beliefs are related to positive literacy and language development in preschool children. More specifically, Weigel et al. found that children's early language skills, including both receptive and expressive language, are strongly associated with the demographics of the parents, whereas the children's early reading skills, specifically print knowledge and interest in reading, were strongly associated with the literacy activities done in the home. Further, both DeBaryshe and Weigel et al. found through their studies on the home literacy environments that positive parental beliefs towards reading contributed positively to children's engagement in literacy activities and to children's literacy development.

Essentially, parents who placed a strong value on literacy and language development and acknowledged the important role that they played in assisting in their child's development of literacy and language engaged more often in literacy and language activities with their children. This engagement then contributes to the child's development in literacy skills.

Upon researching the different perspectives on home literacy environments from the literature, it is evident that the home literacy environments do, in fact, play a role in influencing children's literacy development. The literature demonstrates that the HLE can have either a positive or negative influence on preschool children's literacy development, depending on the specific factors involved in the home (Snow et al., 1991). This is an important point to note because it demonstrates that there is an opportunity for every home environment to be able to positively promote a child's literacy development.

The various home literacy models demonstrate that there is a connection between many of the factors of the home environment. The parental demographics typically connect to the parents' personal literacy habits, literacy levels, attitudes, and beliefs towards literacy (Burgess et al., 2002; DeBaryshe, 1995; Weigel et al., 2005). In turn, the parents' personal literacy habits, attitudes and beliefs towards literacy development relate to the activities that children are exposed to in the home (DeBaryshe, 1995; Weigel et al., 2005). This is important because it displays that the parents' personal behaviours and beliefs towards literacy do, in fact, have an influence on their child's literacy development. For example, if the parents believe that their child's literacy development is important and acknowledge the importance of their role in the literacy development, then they are likely to be more engaged in literacy activities with their children. This engagement in literacy activities is critical because it has been found to help develop

children's literacy skills in the home (Burgess et al., 2002; DeBaryshe, 1995; Weigel et al., 2005). In addition, the research on home literacy environments reveals that a home that promotes a culture of reading has positive influences on the interest that the child has in reading and literacy. For example, if a preschool child is immersed in an environment that contains many books, family members engaging in reading, discussions about words, and regular time spent reading, the child will likely have a greater interest in literacy and reading on a personal level (Burgess et al., 2002; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002).

Finally, the literature on home literacy environment emphasizes that formal literacy activities and direct instruction are most effective for developing specific literacy skills in the home compared to informal literacy practices (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). This is important because it demonstrates that parents must ensure that the literacy activities that they do with their children at home directly teach about specific literacy skills (Snow et al., 1991). Parents cannot assume that children will learn and absorb literacy skills in informal literacy activities; instead parents must make a point to explicitly teach these skills through a variety of literacy activities. However, research also reveals that while informal literacy instruction is less effective than formal literacy instruction in developing children's literacy skills, informal literacy experiences are better to use than complete absence of literacy instruction in the home environment (Snow et al., 1991).

Instructional Strategies

Parents of preschool children have the opportunity to assist in developing their children's emergent and early literacy and reading skills in their home environment. Literature shows that there are a variety of instructional strategies that can be used to help

develop children's emergent literacy skills. Two of the most discussed instructional strategies in literature are shared reading and dialogic reading. A description of the strategies, what the strategies involve, and how they can be used to teach different emergent literacy and reading skills to preschool children will be discussed in the following sections.

Shared Reading

Shared reading is an instructional strategy that can be used to introduce prereading skills to children such as vocabulary knowledge, print awareness, and the structures of stories (Snow et al., 1998). Shared reading is defined as "the interaction that occurs between an adult and a child when reading or looking at a book" (Ezell & Justice, 2005, p. 2). This interaction can occur in a one-on-one manner between the adult and the child or in a group setting with one or more adults and several children. Shared reading can occur in a variety of settings including the home environment, childcare center, preschool classroom, and so on. Most important, the interaction that occurs during shared reading is one that involves the active engagement and involvement of both the child and the parent (Ezell & Justice, 2005). Typically, during shared reading the focus is on the words in the book, pictures and illustrations, and the storyline itself (Ezell & Justice, 2005).

Research shows that shared reading activities are typically the most common reading activities that are being used in home literacy environment by parents (Burgess, 2011; Ezell & Justice, 2005; Senechal et al., 1998). According to Karrass and Braungart-Rieker (2005), shared reading is the most discussed aspect of the home literacy environment in the media and by teachers. It has also been the most heavily studied

aspect of the home literacy environment by researchers (Karrass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005). There are many differing perspectives about shared reading. While some believe that shared reading is a successful way of assisting children in their reading development, others believe that shared reading in itself is not enough to develop the essential early reading and literacy skills for children.

Karrass and Braungart-Rieker (2005) studied the effectiveness of shared reading experiences with infants in assisting to develop expressive language abilities in future months. They found that shared reading activities done with 8-month-old infants were associated with expressive language at 16 months (Karrass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005). A secondary finding from this study was that shared reading relates to the development of a child's expressive language but not to receptive language (Karrass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005). This means that, according to this study, using shared reading assists infants in learning to use words to convey meaning, but it does not contribute to their comprehension of spoken words and language.

One way in which shared reading may influence a child's language development is through teaching the child joint attention (Tomasello & Farrar, 1986). This is accomplished in shared reading when children practice being able to match words with objects. Print referencing is one way in which parents can help their children develop joint attention by learning to match words with objects or pictures (Zucker et al., 2009). Print referencing is a technique where the parent uses verbal and nonverbal references or cues to draw the child's attention to the print at hand (Zucker et al., 2009). A second way in which it is projected that shared reading may assist in the development of language is through children hearing parents using more complex vocabulary, language, and more

sophisticated sentence structure found in books compared to that in everyday interactions (Karrass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005). Children can learn a variety of new words and be exposed to fluent reading through this experience and therefore further develop their literacy and language skills.

A third way in which shared reading may assist in developing children's language occurs when parents discuss and teach children about vocabulary words found in books (Karrass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005). When coming across new words during shared reading, it is essential for parents to use the opportunity to directly teach the child what the words mean so that the child can read the words and use the words again in the future. In addition, the consistency of parents engaging in shared reading with children on a regular basis may impact children's language through assisting in the development of regular reading habits (Karrass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005). Moreover, the repeated exposure of books to children not only assists in the development of regular reading habits, but it also provides children with an opportunity to widen their vocabulary.

According to research, shared reading experiences in the home assist in the development of children's vocabulary and oral language skills for young children (Ezell & Justice, 2005; Senechal & LeFevre, 2001; Trehearne et al., 2005). In addition, home literacy studies that specifically focused on shared reading experiences found that shared reading primarily influences oral language rather than phonological awareness or print knowledge (Ezell & Justice, 2005; Lonigan, Dyer, & Anthony, 1996; Raz & Bryant, 1990). However, Lefebvre et al. (2011) found that incorporating explicit instruction into shared reading can enhance vocabulary, print awareness, and phonological awareness in low-income preschool children. These findings are important because oral language

development and vocabulary development are predictors of text comprehension in the future for children. Further, it is beneficial to understand that incorporating explicit instruction into shared reading can help develop these important skills (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). Lefebvre et al. also found that using explicit instruction as opposed to implicit learning is more efficient in the development of emergent literacy.

Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, and Epstein's study (1994) supported the study by Lefebvre et al. (2011) when they also discovered that explicit instruction involving the elaboration of the meanings of words during shared reading led to improved vocabulary and language development. This elaboration of the meaning of words involves providing a definition, participating in role-play about the word, directing the child to a picture that relates to the word, or using the word in a different sentence (Justice, Meier, & Walpole, 2005). Another important aspect of shared reading that can assist in developing vocabulary is repeated exposure to texts (Arnold et al., 1994; Justice et al., 2005; Senechal, 1997). As found by Senechal (1997), increasing the amount of exposure that a child has to a text allows for the child to learn new words more easily.

Parental behaviour while engaging in reading time with children is linked to the language development of the child (Arnold et al., 1994; Vandermaas-Peeler, Sassine, Price, & Brilhart, 2012). Three positive parental behaviours used during shared reading include evocative techniques, parental feedback, and progressive change (Arnold et al., 1994). Evocative techniques encourage the child to be more active in the reading by answering "what" questions about the text (Arnold et al., 1994). Parental feedback can help benefit children's language development because the feedback provides them with new information through modeling, corrections, praise, and word expansions (Arnold et

al., 1994). Progressive change is based on the assumption of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978b), where the adult encourages the child to develop language in a naturally occurring progression in supported learning (Arnold et al., 1994). For example, the child should know the name of an object before he or she is asked about the function of the object.

Shared reading activities also provide children with opportunities to gain print awareness skills (S. A. Stahl, 2003). Print awareness involves the knowledge of different forms, functions, and conventions of print (Justice & Ezell, 2001). Skills associated with print awareness include understanding that print holds meaning; being familiar with different book elements such as the cover and title; knowing the letters of the alphabet, knowing how to properly handle books, and understanding the directionality of print (Lefevbre et al., 2011). During shared reading, adults can teach print awareness to children using both verbal and nonverbal cues. Verbal cues such as interrupting the reading in order to discuss the print and nonverbal cues such as pointing to the text while reading help the children involved in shared reading become more aware of the print with which they are interacting and reading (Lefevbre et al., 2011).

Phonological awareness was found to increase through the use of explicit instruction in shared reading (Lefevbre et al., 2011). However, Stadler and McEvoy (2003) found that during shared reading parents rarely used reading strategies to increase phonological awareness, but rather focused on developing vocabulary and print awareness. It was also found that during shared reading many parents gave minimal attention to the letters and sounds (contributing to phonological awareness) and focused more on story recall and descriptive talk (Hindman, Connor, Jewkes, & Morrison, 2008).

Yet, when rhyme and sound awareness were incorporated into shared reading, results show that they were successful in improving children's rhyming knowledge and initial sound knowledge (Ziolkowski & Goldstein, 2008). Therefore, this demonstrates that explicit instruction about phonological awareness, specifically rhyme and letter sounds, embedded in shared reading can assist in the development of phonological awareness skills such as rhyming and letter sound knowledge (Ziolkowski & Goldstein, 2008).

A study by Evans and Saint-Aubin (2005) looked at the eye movements that occurred during shared reading. They concluded that during shared reading or storybook reading, where the parent is reading directly to the child, the child engages only the illustrations in the book and not the actual written text (Evans & Saint-Aubin, 2005). On the other hand, L. M. Phillips, Norris, and Anderson (2008) studied the connection between shared book reading and the development of emergent literacy. Findings revealed that during shared book reading, parents are typically not teaching children letter names and sounds, similarities in words, questioning of important incidents, reading strategies, and word meanings (L. M Phillips et al., 2008). They concluded that while shared reading is interesting for children and assists in the development of oral language, a major shortcoming of shared book reading by itself is that it does not foster emergent literacy development because it is lacking the discussion beyond the words being read in the book (L. M Phillips et al., 2008). The development of emergent literacy occurs only when shared reading is performed in conjunction with explicit teaching about print (L. M. Phillips et al., 2008).

As explained by L. M. Phillips et al. (2008) and Senechal et al. (1998), it is imperative for parents to move beyond simply reading to their children and actually

participate in a more active reading and teaching time where they name letters, shapes, and numbers and engage in a discussion while answering questions about the text. An essential statement about shared reading is made by Meyer, Stahl, Wardrop, & Linn (1992), stating that "being read *to* is not enough" (p. 27). Therefore, it is clear based on the prior research that in order to assist in effectively developing children's emergent literacy, shared reading must be supported by other text-based lessons (Meyer et al., 1992; L. M. Phillips et al., 2008).

Dialogic Reading

Dialogic reading is an interactive type of reading instruction that involves adults incorporating a variety of different strategies to engage the child during the interactive reading time (Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi, & Cutting, 2006; Flynn, 2011; Huebner & Payne, 2010). Dialogic reading is an evidence-based approach to shared book reading, described by Whitehurst and various colleagues (Arnold et al., 1994; Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Whitehurst et al., 1999). Whitehurst and his colleagues have demonstrated that using dialogic reading is highly successful in developing children's language skills (Ezell & Justice, 2005; Flynn, 2011).

The major goal of dialogic reading is for the child to take on the role of the active storyteller while the parent or adult takes on the role of facilitator. Thus the adult is guiding the child and encouraging the child to expand on the ideas that have been constructed through the use of prompts and questions (Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil, Pirozzi, & Cutting, 2006; Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi, Volpe, Cutting, & Bissinger, 2006; Flynn, 2011). Children are able to develop their expressive language because the children are encouraged to be active during the reading time, therefore speaking more than they would

during shared reading (Flynn, 2011). Rather than asking closed-ended "yes or no" questions, the parents are instructed to facilitate more of an open discussion and dialogue about the book by asking the children open-ended questions such as who, what, and when (Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi, & Cutting, 2006; Flynn, 2011). Parents are encouraged to go through the book at least three times with the children, each time encouraging the children to move past the words on the page and make more connections to the children, therefore allowing for more dialogue from the child (Flynn, 2011). In addition to the open-ended questioning, the parents are taught to be encouraging to the children, find ways to make connections to the children's personal interests, repeat what the children say, have children repeat new words and expansions, provide assistance to the children as necessary, continually pose more questions in response to the children's answers, and make the experience enjoyable for the children (Arnold et al., 1994; Blom-Hoffmann, O'Neil-Pirozzi, & Cutting, 2006; Flynn, 2011; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Dialogic reading strategies taught to children in combination with training about phonemic awareness have even greater positive effects on a child's emergent literacy skills than shared reading (Whitehurst et al., 1999). In comparison to shared reading or picture book reading, dialogic reading has been shown to produce greater effects on the child's oral language skills (Arnold et al., 1994; Whitehurst, Epstein, Angell, Payne, Crone, Fischel, 1994; Whitehurst et al., 1999). More specifically, dialogic reading strategies assist in developing a child's oral language in a variety of settings as well as developing their expressive vocabulary (Arnold et al., 1994; Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi, Volpe, et al., 2006; Flynn, 2011; Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Opel, Ameer, & Aboud, 2009).

Initially, Whitehurst and colleagues studied dialogic reading as a form of reading instruction between the child and parent (Arnold et al., 1994; Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi, Volpe, et al., 2006; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). However, it was noted by Flynn (2011) that dialogic reading is also effective to use with children ranging from 2 years old to 6 years old in a variety of settings: with parents at home, in child care settings, in classroom settings, and in special education programs for young children. The findings by Opel et al. (2009) support and extend Flynn's research as their study showed that dialogic reading is useful not only in a small shared reading environment but also with a large group of 20–25 preschoolers. This particular study, done in rural Bangladesh, also demonstrates that dialogic reading is effective at increasing expressive vocabulary in a low-resource and low-literacy country (Opel et al., 2009).

Parents using dialogic reading practices with their children are encouraged to utilize two acronyms to assist them in remembering the specific prompts during dialogic reading (i.e., CROWD and PEER). For example, the acronym CROWD reminds parents of the following: **c**ompletion of prompts (fill-in-the-blank questions), **r**ecall the prompt (recall details from the book), **o**pen-ended prompts, **w**h-prompts (what, where, and why questions), and **d**istancing prompts (create links between the text and the child's experiences). In addition, PEER is also useful in reminding parents of the dialogic reading techniques: **p**rompt (encourage the child to identify items in the book and talk about them), **e**valuate (using praise statements for correct answers, or correct the child's incorrect answers), **e**xpand (repeating the child's ideas while introducing additional ideas), and **r**epeat (repeat the initial prompt to assess the child's understanding and

encourage the child to repeat his or her ideas; Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi, Volpe, et al., 2006).

Traditionally, dialogic reading techniques were taught to parents in a face-to face manner. The training sessions typically involved engaging in direct instruction, modeling of the strategies, and an opportunity for role play where the parent is provided with useful feedback (Arnold et al., 1994). Huebner and Payne (2010) found that the parents who were instructed on how to use dialogic reading techniques with their children ages 2 or 3 years old continued to use this form of instruction with their children more than 2 years later. This displays that the skills taught to parents are not only useful and practical but also memorable enough that they are used in later years by parents.

On the other hand, video-based dialogic reading instruction used to teach dialogic reading strategies to parents is a method that is growing in popularity. As proposed by Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi, Volpe, et al. (2006), using dialogic reading videotape instruction is beneficial because it is easy to implement, encourages a standardization of training, provides parents with an opportunity to learn new skills through observation, and is both time and cost efficient (Arnold et al., 1994). *Read together, talk together* is one example of a video-based dialogic reading program designed to teach parents how to use dialogic reading strategies with their children, created by Pearson Early Learning (2002) and Whitehurst et al. (1999). This form of videotape training was found to be viewed positively and highly accepted by parents and early childhood educators across a variety of settings (Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi, Volpe, et al., 2006). In addition, Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi, Volpe et al. (2006) found that parents who learned dialogic reading strategies through video-based instruction successfully continued to use

their newly formed dialogic reading strategies when reading with their children 12 weeks later. Overall, teaching parents to use dialogic reading strategies was an effective way to teach children early language, literacy, and reading skills.

Literature demonstrates that using instructional strategies such as shared reading and dialogic reading can help to develop children's emergent literacy. While both of these strategies have benefits and may be useful when teaching children early reading and literacy skills, literature emphasizes one additional point: Explicit instruction is necessary (L. M. Phillips et al., 2008). In both shared reading and dialogic reading, children must be explicitly taught about specific literacy skills because simply reading to the children is not enough to make any large difference in their emergent literacy development (Meyer et al., 1992; L. M. Phillips et al., 2008; Senechal et al., 1998). By incorporating explicit instruction into shared reading and dialogic reading, the children's emergent literacy skills such as phonological awareness, print awareness, and vocabulary development will develop more than when they are simply being read to (L. M. Phillips et al., 2008; Whitehurst et al., 1999).

Chapter Summary

Conclusively, the review of the literature demonstrates that emergent literacy is an essential aspect of a child's literacy development. The early literacy skills that children develop such as letter name awareness, phonological awareness, rhyme awareness, vocabulary knowledge, print awareness, oral language development, and being able to understand texts are the important literacy building blocks that children need to have (Anthony et al., 2007; Haney & Hill, 2004; Irwin et al., 2012; Roberts et al., 2005; S. S. Stahl &Yaden, 2004). Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) indicate that children develop

literacy and reading skills in a progressive manner, indicating that they should be learning about early reading and literacy skills before they enter school. These early skills will then be further developed when children begin school in kindergarten and grade 1.

Literature demonstrates that the home literacy environment is an essential place for children to encounter language and literacy and to gain emergent literacy and reading skills (Purcell-Gates, 1996; Senechal et al., 1998; Strickland & Taylor, 1989). Therefore, parents play an important role in assisting their children to develop early reading and literacy skills during their preschool years. After studying a variety of home literacy environment models, it was determined that the parents' attitudes, beliefs, and personal literacy habits have significant influences on the child's literacy development and the literacy activities that they participate in at home (DeBaryshe, 1995; Weigel et al., 2005). Parents may not realize that their own literacy beliefs and behaviours have an influence on their children's literacy development, but research demonstrates that, in fact, they do.

Two of the most discussed instructional strategies found in the literature are the shared reading model and the dialogic reading model. Both of these instructional strategies are regarded as important in literacy development according to the literature; however, shared reading itself has been criticized by various researchers; they claim that shared reading in itself is not enough to successfully teach emergent literacy to children (Meyer et al., 1992; L. M. Phillips et al., 2008). On the other hand, the more interactive methods of dialogic reading are supported by researchers and have been demonstrated to be effective at involving children in the reading process so that they are able to develop emergent literacy skills (Arnold et al., 1994; Whitehurst et al., 1994; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Whitehurst et al., 1999).

Much of the literature illustrates the importance of parents using formal literacy experiences and explicit instruction in the home environment to teach children about letter names and sounds, print awareness, phonological awareness, and vocabulary development (Haney & Hill, 2004; L. M. Phillips et al., 2008; Whitehurst et al., 1999). Integrating explicit instruction into instructional strategies such as shared reading and dialogic reading provides opportunities to develop children's emergent literacy skills more than if shared reading and dialogic reading were used on their own.

Finally, the literature review consolidated the importance of parents being involved in their preschool children's reading and literacy development in the home environment before they enter school. Parents must be aware of the role that they play in their preschool child's literacy and reading development so that they have the opportunity to provide their child with a rich home literacy environment. Ultimately, the literature informed the development of *A Home Literacy Handbook for Parents with Preschool Children,* and emphasized the potential that this handbook has to be an effective resource for parents to use in the home environment.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this project was to develop a handbook for parents with preschool children. The intent was to create a handbook that would be practical, helpful, and a parent-friendly resource that parents could utilize in their home environment to provide a variety of rich literacy and reading activities to help in the development of their preschool child's emergent literacy. It is important to note that this handbook is a means for providing assistance to parents; it is not intended to be the definitive home literacy program, nor does it claim to solve difficulties in children's reading and literacy development. This chapter discusses the need for the handbook and the process of the development of the handbook. The sections below outline the needs assessment, the recruitment of participants, instrumentation used, ethical considerations, and the results of the needs assessment.

Needs Assessment

A needs assessment was conducted to identify specific needs and ideas from parents and teachers; these perspectives and ideas were used to supplement the ideas in the literature to build a foundation for the handbook. Implementing needs assessments in educational research has been done for many years in order to take a close look at the specific needs of people in order to make informed decisions about the subject (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). As described by Kaufman and English (1979), needs assessments are tools that are used to determine the gaps or needs of the current outcomes in order to implement positive and productive change that is beneficial for the people involved. Needs assessments can be used in a variety of situations to identify students' learning weaknesses, provide information about the needs or deficits of a program,

highlight the students' instructional needs, and identify gaps that could be filled in various areas of education (Cohen et al., 2000).

Looking specifically at this project, the needs assessment was done with grade 1 and grade 2 teachers and parents with preschool children or children in kindergarten or grade 1. Communicating with both the teachers and parents is important because the multiple perspectives contribute to the development of a comprehensive handbook. The questionnaire completed by the grade 1 and grade 2 teachers allowed the researcher to hear a professional perspective on the topic of home literacy, what skills struggling readers typically lack, and what skills or activities are recommended to be done in the home to develop children's emergent literacy skills. On the other hand, the questionnaire completed by the parents provided the researcher with a glimpse into the literacy experiences occurring in a handful of homes and insightful ideas surrounding what resources parents would like to have in order to provide effective home literacy opportunities to their preschool children.

Participant Recruitment

In order to create a comprehensive handbook for parents, a needs assessment was conducted with parents and teachers. Including both parents and teachers in this research project allowed for multiple perspectives about home literacy to be heard. The following section describes the recruitment process that occurred to include teachers and parents in the needs assessment.

Teacher Recruitment

The teachers provided an important perspective for this handbook because they were able to communicate their specific professional experiences in regards to children's

emergent literacy and reading abilities. Three grade 1 teachers and one Grade 2 teacher participated in the needs assessment questionnaire for this project. These teachers were from a school board in southern Ontario and had all been primary teachers for at least one year. The teacher participants were selected from a convenience sample, and they were chosen based on the researcher's previous interactions in the schools. A letter of invitation was sent to the initial participant, and this participant was asked to pass out the letter of invitation to anyone who might be interested. Four teachers in the southern Ontario school board volunteered to participate by completing the questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to the teachers via email, and after gathering the information needed, the questionnaires were destroyed to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

Parent Recruitment

The parents of preschool children also had a very important voice in this project. They were able to provide the researcher with a glimpse at the literacy activities that occur in the home environment and the needs that parents have in trying to provide a rich home literacy environment to their children. The four mothers who participated in the needs assessment were recruited using convenience sampling through a reading centre. Three of mothers had children under the age of 5, and one mother had a child in grade 1. All four of the mothers were Canadian and spoke English as their first language. A letter of invitation was sent to the parents, specifically those with preschool children or children in grade 1. The parents involved in the needs assessment had previously been enrolled in the reading centre prior to this project. The letter invited parents to participate in a needs assessment focus group at the reading centre to hear the parents' perspective about home literacy during children's preschool years. The parents were made aware that they were

able to withdraw their decision to participate in the focus group at any time, and in this case, any information already gathered from them would be destroyed and not included in the needs assessment. However, due to the different schedules of parents, a focus group was not conducted; the questions from the focus group were sent to the mothers as a written email questionnaire instead.

Instrumentation

The needs assessment to identify the parents' needs in providing an effective home literacy environment and the skills involved in children's early literacy development during their preschool years was conducted in two ways: a written email questionnaire completed by grade 1 and grade 2 teachers and a written email questionnaire completed by parents of preschool children or children in kindergarten or grade 1. The results from the needs assessment together with strategies from the literature provided the basis for the design of the handbook for parents.

Teacher Questionnaire

The following questions were asked to the grade 1 and grade 2 teachers:

1. What skills, abilities, and competencies do you emphasize in your grade 1 and/or grade 2 literacy program? Please elaborate.
2. Similar to all classrooms, it is assumed that there are a range of reading abilities and literacy levels amongst the children in grade 1 and grade 2 classrooms. What do you believe these differences in reading and literacy levels are due to?
3. Do you think that parents should play a role in assisting to develop their preschool children's literacy skills before entering grade 1? Explain your reasoning.
4. As a teacher in grade 1 and/or grade 2, what types of reading and literacy activities

should parents be doing with their children before entering school to prepare them for a grade 1 and/or grade 2 literacy program? Please explain with examples.

Parent Questionnaire

The following questions were included in the questionnaire for the parents:

1. Tell me about what literacy and reading activities you do with your preschool child at home. Describe and give examples to explain.
   (a) Describe how you read to your children. What do you do and say? What is your reading process? What does your child do when he/she is reading or being read to?
   (b) What is your role during the reading time? What role does your child play during the reading time?
   (c) Aside from reading, are there any other literacy activities that you do with your preschool children related to literacy development? (Example. rhyming, alphabet letters, letter sounds, etc.). Describe these activities and provide examples.
2. Are there any supports or resources that would be beneficial for you in order to help provide your child with a rich home literacy environment in which he or she can develop early reading and literacy skills?
   (a) What types of resources do you think your preschool child would benefit from in order develop literacy skills before they enter school?

Data Collection and Recording

The four Ontario certified teachers who were recruited to participate in the needs assessment were asked to complete the needs assessment questionnaire via email. The researcher sent the questionnaire to the teachers' email, and the teachers were asked to email the questionnaire directly back to the researcher when complete. Likewise, the four

parents that volunteered to participate in the needs assessment were asked to complete the questionnaire via email. The parents were emailed the written questionnaire and were asked to complete the questionnaire at a time convenient for them. Upon completion, the parents emailed the questionnaire directly back to the researcher. After receiving the completed questionnaires from the parents and teachers, the researcher reviewed the questionnaires and summarized the responses provided by the participants into common themes and differences.

Findings From the Needs Assessment

In order to maintain confidentiality, the responses of the individual participants will not be disclosed. Instead, the main themes and common ideas gathered from the four teachers and four parents are summarized below.

Findings From Teacher Questionnaires

The following responses illustrate the main ideas that the teachers provided in response to the four questions on the questionnaire:

1. The *skills, abilities*, and *competencies* emphasized in grade 1and grade 2 literacy programs include emphasis on reading for enjoyment, children's love for reading, and teaching children to believe that they are successful readers; teaching strategies to help children decode, pronounce, and understand unfamiliar words; teaching the importance of rereading books, pages, sentences, and words when necessary; The Daily CAFE strategies (comprehension, accuracy, fluency, expand vocabulary) taught to assist in monitoring children's understanding; activities to develop phonological awareness; teaching the 26 alphabet letters and corresponding sounds; concepts about print and how

to properly engage in print; oral language development; making connections when reading (text to text, text to self, text to world).

2. *Differences in children's reading and literacy levels* in grade 1 or grade 2 may be associated with different levels of parent involvement at home; children's observations of parents' engagement in reading; exposure to reading at home with parents and individually; exposure to a variety of books at home; exposure to phonological awareness activities and games; parents being unaware of how to teach their children the beginning steps in reading—neglecting daily reading time and instruction about alphabet letters; developmental readiness—differences in the time of year children are born have an effect on their maturity and interest in reading; a time lag in being able to diagnose learning disabilities associated with reading.

3. Yes, *parents* should play a *role* in their preschool children's literacy development at home. Parents do not need to predevelop their children's literacy skills, because they will be taught in school. However, playing a role in helping to develop basic early skills is beneficial in preparing children for what they will learn in school. Parent involvement is one of the key factors associated with children's literacy development. Parents have the opportunity to instill a love for reading in their children at an early age based on the attitudes towards reading and reading behaviours that occur in the home. Parents should begin reading with children at birth; in turn children will learn from listening, observing parents, and being involved in the reading time. Setting aside time every day to read with children is essential; the more exposure and interactions that children have with books greatly assists their development of early literacy skills.

4. There are a variety of *reading and literacy activities* that parents can do with their preschool children to prepare them for a grade 1 literacy program:

- Set aside time to read aloud to children daily and talk about what they have read.
- Emphasize the idea that reading is enjoyable and is for pleasure by making reading time interactive, fun, and special for children.
- Read a variety of books with children, and reread favourite books often.
- Point out and read environmental print to children so they learn that reading is a natural part of everyday life—encourage children to read environmental print.
- Introduce print concepts to children so they gain knowledge about print at a young age.
- Introduce phonological awareness activities to children (various rhyming games and sound blending games).
- Teach the letters of the alphabet to children in creative ways that are memorable and engaging for them (flash card hide and seek; use letters in the bathtub; help develop grocery lists; write notes to family members; encourage children to play with letter fridge magnets; play I spy with letters; use white boards, chalk, sand, play-dough to practice making letters).
- Practice reading grade 1 high frequency sight words, colour words, and number words.

Findings from Parent Questionnaires

The following responses illustrate the main ideas that the four parents provided in the written email questionnaire:

1. Parents are doing a variety of *literacy and reading activities* at home with their preschool children:

- Reading typically occurs as a daily interaction between the parent and child. In some cases the parent chooses the book, and in other cases the child chooses the book. The children's favourite books are reread very often.
- The parent sets aside a quiet time every day when both the parent and child spend time independently with books. After the designated quiet time is over, the parent asks the child to describe what was read. The child is provided with the opportunity to recall the contents in the book and feel like he or she is a successful reader.
- Finding ways to make watching television meaningful is very important. Watching Sesame Street, Dora the Explorer, and Leap Frog videos such as Letter Factory and Word Factory are beneficial programs for children to watch to assist in learning their alphabet letters. Looking up shows on the television guide is another meaningful experience for children where they learn to identify the letters in the title of the show, the numbers in the show time, as well as the channel number it is playing on.
- Going to the local library is an excellent literacy activity to do with children because they are able to see a variety of books and be in an atmosphere where books and reading are valued. Taking weekly trips to the library is a great way to introduce children to a variety of books. Parents encourage children to sign out books to read at home during the week. Each week children feel like successful

readers because they have read through all of the books they took home with them.

- Puzzles are great activities that children can use to practice a variety of skills (alphabet letter knowledge, item sequencing, matching, etc.).
- Creating a story is an excellent literacy activity that parents can do with children to reinforce many of the skills learned at home. The parent asks the child to come up with a story; the child dictates the story, and the parent writes or types the child's words.

  (a) The *reading process* described by the parents involves:

  - The parent and child discuss the title and cover illustrations, and make predictions before reading.
  - The parent reads with expression and animation to engage the child in the story.
  - Child points to the words as they are being read. This finger pointing technique is first modelled by the parent, and the child adapts these reading behaviours to help make associations between how the words look and their pronunciation and to help the child follow along in the story.
  - Child sits close to the parent and flips the page after the page has been read.
  - Questions about the illustrations, characters, what happened, and what might happen next are asked throughout the reading time to check for comprehension and involve the child in the book.
  - If there is a break in the reading, or if it is a book with multiple sections or chapters, the parent asks the child to recall where they ended last time and

what happened previously in the story.

- The parent gives praise to the child after any answer is provided or if the child makes any attempt to read.
- Children should have their own collection of books that belong to them. It should be emphasized that books are treasures, and time spent reading is special and unique from other activities that children do.

2. There are some parents that would appreciate having a resource that provides a general overview of the literacy skills that children should have at a certain age and creative ideas about what literacy activities parents should be doing with children. An outline of good books to use and a resource that provides an overview of general questions to ask and statements to say during the reading time would also be beneficial for parents.

Summary of Findings

The results from the needs assessment demonstrate a variety of important factors that relate to the construction of the handbook. First of all, the findings highlight that the role of the parent in the home literacy environment does, in fact, influence preschool children's literacy development. Parents have the opportunity to introduce children to their first literacy and reading encounters, and the parents and teachers feel that this early engagement in reading and literacy is beneficial to prepare children for school. The research questions to support development of the handbook were answered through hearing the perspectives from the parents and teachers in the needs assessments.

- What literacy and reading skills should preschool children have to meet the expected reading and literacy levels for kindergarten and grade 1?

In regards to the first research question, it appears that the most crucial literacy skills that preschool children should have include: knowledge of the alphabet, awareness of sounds (phonological awareness), a basic knowledge of print concepts, oral language skills, and an interest in reading and interacting with books.

- What are effective literacy and reading activities that parents can use in the home environment to promote reading and literacy development in their preschool child?

In regards to the second research question, the parents and teachers provided a wide variety of example activities that can be done to prepare children for a grade 1 literacy program. Some of the activities that can reinforce learning the alphabet in creative hands-on ways include using white boards, playing alphabet I spy, using letter fridge magnets, using play-dough, sand, or chalk to create letters, using foam letters in the bathtub, playing letter hide and seek, and using technology such as Leap Frog and Sesame Street. Some of the activities that can be used to reinforce phonological awareness include playing games where the child has to make rhymes and playing blending games where the child has to blend word sounds together to create one word.

Some of the ways that parents taught and reinforced print concepts were to ask the child to identify the parts of the book before reading, having the parent explicitly outline the print concepts as they appear in the book, having the child hold the book and flip the pages, and encouraging the child to finger point or hug each word with their fingers to help focus on one word at a time. Some everyday activities that were done to teach and reinforce oral language development included asking children to describe and retell stories they have read, encouraging family talk during dinner, asking children

comprehension questions while reading, and having children describe the illustrations and make predictions based on the illustrations in the book. Some of the ways children were encouraged to develop a love for reading were to make reading an enjoyable time for children, to give books to children as gifts so that they see books as treasures, to have a regular quiet time where the child and parent both spend time alone with a book, and allowing children to see parents spending time reading for enjoyment.

Ethical Considerations

The needs assessment component of this research project required communication between the researcher and participants. Due to the contact with human participants through the needs assessment questionnaires, ethics approval was obtained from Brock University's Research Ethics Board [12-263].

A minor ethical risk involved in this research project was that some of the parent participants may have felt uncomfortable sharing personal experiences about their home literacy practices in a focus group setting. However, due to complications in scheduling, the parents completed the questionnaire individually instead of in a focus group, therefore not having to share their experiences with other parents. In addition, the responses provided by the participants were confidential, and their names were not released in any part of the research project. All data collected were aggregated into themes, all of the questionnaires were destroyed, and electronic communication was deleted.

Limitations

There are some limitations from this research project that should be acknowledged. First of all, the number of participants involved in the needs assessment was small. It was beneficial to have the four teachers and four parents participate in the

research project; however having more participants would provide more diverse perspectives on the topic and increase the reliability of the design and content of the handbook. Hearing the perspectives from more participants would, in turn, make the handbook more applicable to a wider parent audience. A second limitation was that the participants involved lived in the same general geographic area in southern Ontario. This means that it may be difficult to apply the handbook to other groups of people living outside of the southern Ontario area.

Process of Development of the Handbook

The review of the literature provided research about emergent literacy, the home literacy environment, and instructional strategies to assist in developing the handbook that will be a helpful resource for parents with preschool children. In addition to the literature review, the needs assessments also provided important information used to create the handbook. The teacher questionnaire gave a voice to the professional teachers' perspectives towards early literacy practices in the home, and the parent questionnaire gave a voice to parents, allowing them to verbalize their needs required in helping to develop their children's reading and literacy skills at home. The combination of the review of the literature and the needs assessment written email questionnaires provided a view on home literacy activities for preschool children necessary to create this handbook.

Overall, the handbook has been designed to be a helpful resource for parents with preschool children. All parents have an opportunity to provide a rich home literacy environment to their children that fosters learning of early literacy skills. The hope is that parents will find this resource to be supportive and useful so that they are able to teach

early reading and literacy skills to their preschool children in a way that is engaging and enjoyable for the children.

Restatement of the Area of Study

The purpose of this research project was twofold: (a) to provide parents with an awareness of the importance of the role that they play in their preschool children's literacy and reading development; and (b) to construct a practical, useful, parent-friendly, and meaningful handbook for parents with preschool children containing strategies, lessons, and activities to assist them in providing rich home literacy experiences to their preschool children. After conducting the needs assessments, the results have been used to create a practical handbook for parents with preschool children. This handbook will provide parents with a variety of activities and lessons that they will be able to use to assist in developing their children's emergent literacy skills in their home literacy environment.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE HANDBOOK

The handbook, *A Home Literacy Handbook for Parents with Preschool Children,* presented in this chapter contains two major sections. Section 1 is an introduction for the parents that was created using the information from the academic literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The introduction sets the stage for the handbook, providing parents with background knowledge that provides a foundation for the entire handbook. The introduction defines, explains, and provides an overview of emergent literacy and the home literacy environment in a parent-friendly manner. The components of emergent literacy are defined and explained in this section. Parents reading this introduction will gain important knowledge about why it is important for children to learn reading and literacy skills in their preschool years and the significance of a rich home literacy environment for children.

Section 2 of the handbook includes the activities that can be used to assist in developing preschool children's emergent literacy skills. The activities are divided into four different sections, each a component of emergent literacy: oral language, alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and print awareness. Each of the four sections contains a variety of practical activities that parents can use to teach the specific emergent literacy component. The activities were created using a combination of the information found in academic literature, teaching resources, and the ideas from parents and teachers through the needs assessments.

The handbook concludes with a list of resources from the Government of Ontario that parents can use to get additional information about early literacy development and teaching children in the home environment.

A Home Literacy Handbook for Parents With Preschool Children

Developed by: Jessica Robinson

Brock University, 2013

Dear Parents,

The preschool years are an important time for children when they are learning many new things about the world around them, and about their own skills and abilities. This time during the preschool years is also a critical period when children can begin to develop their early reading and literacy skills.

The home environment that children live in plays an important role in providing opportunities for preschool children to be able to develop their early reading and literacy skills before they enter school. The role of parents is primarily important in the home environment: You can teach your preschool children a variety of early literacy skills.

This handbook has been created in order to assist parents to provide valuable learning opportunities and literacy experiences for your preschool children in the home environment. This home literacy handbook was compiled using a variety of different resources to create a handbook containing activities that are helpful and practical for parents to use and that are engaging and interesting for your children. First, research from academic literature was used as a foundation for the handbook. Second, ideas from grade 1 and 2 teachers were gathered to add a professional perspective to the topic of home literacy. Finally, the needs, ideas, and perspectives towards home literacy were collected from parents with preschool children and children in kindergarten or grade 1. Through the combination of these three different perspectives on home literacy, I believe that a useful and practical handbook has been developed for parents.

The first section of this handbook provides parents with an overview of literacy concepts such as emergent (or early) literacy and the home literacy environment. The second section provides parents with a variety of activities that can be used in the home to help develop your preschool child's early reading and literacy skills.

An important piece of information for you to know is that your child will benefit from any amount of time that you spend with him or her reading and developing literacy skills. Hopefully this handbook can provide you with some practical activities that you will be able to incorporate into your home environment. I truly believe that the parent's role is critical in their child's literacy development, and I am very excited to provide this handbook to parents as a resource. I am committed to teaching and children's learning, and I thank you for your dedication in playing a role in your child's learning as well.

Thank you,

Jessica Robinson

Table of Contents

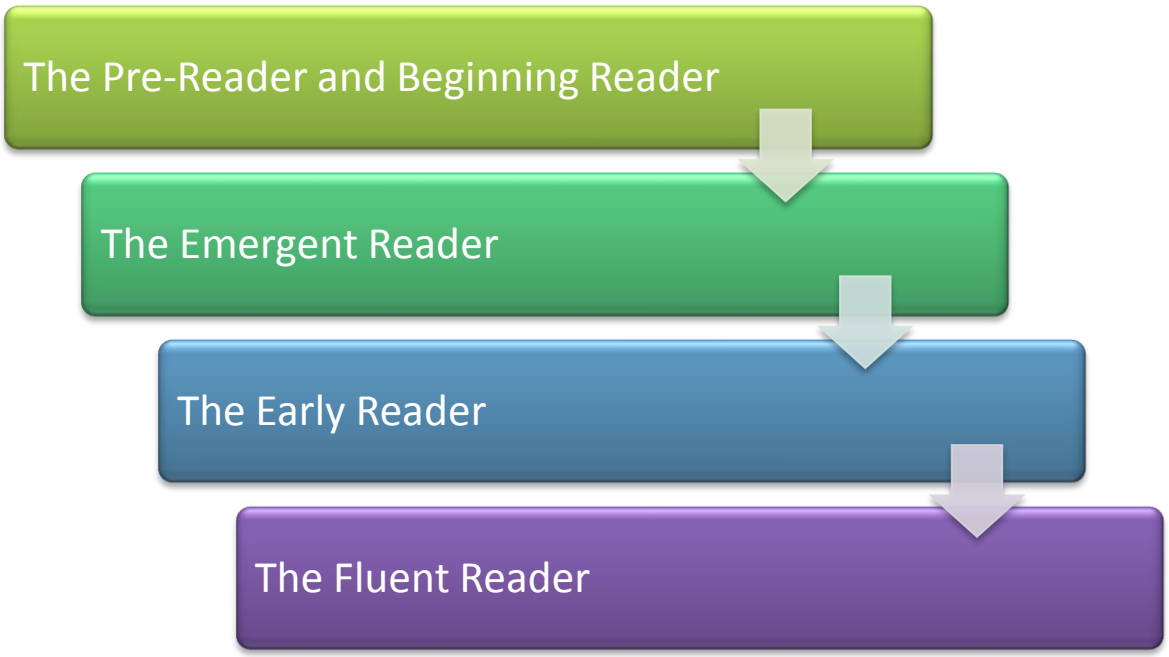
SECTION 1:

Introduction

The Stages of Literacy Development

Literacy development and learning to read are skills that occur over time. Children begin to develop literacy in the early years of their life, and their literacy skills continue to develop in different stages; each stage builds upon the previous stages. While the progression of literacy development is clear, it is difficult to assign specific age ranges to the four stages of literacy development because every child develops at a different pace.

The following flow chart illustrates the progression involved in learning to read as outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education's document (2001), titled *Helping your child learn to read: A parent's guide*:



Adapted from Ontario Ministry of Education (2001)

The average preschool child typically falls under the category of the emergent reader, or sometimes the early reader. This handbook focuses primarily on emergent readers because this stage is most common to preschool children, approximately ages 3–6. Some attention will be given to early readers because there are some preschool children who will have progressed to this stage before entering school.

Emergent Literacy

Definition:

- Emergent literacy is defined as the basic knowledge, skills, and attitudes that toddlers and young children begin to learn in the early stages of reading (Irwin, Moore, Tornatore, & Fowler, 2012; Zeece & Churchill, 2001).
- It is also described as early literacy in some cases.

The significance of emergent literacy:

- The term emergent literacy is significant because it demonstrates that literacy development begins before children enter school.
- Literacy development occurs in a developmental manner. According to this developmental process, young children are able to form a solid knowledge base of literacy and continue to build their new learning experiences on skills previously learned as they get older.
- Rather than waiting to teach children literacy skills when they enter school, proponents of emergent literacy suggest the idea that literacy development should be occurring in the preschool years. This means that there is great value in literacy-related activities that toddlers and preschool children encounter (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Emergent literacy development:

- The research surrounding emergent literacy demonstrates that emergent literacy can be developed in a variety of ways:
- Interactions in social contexts.
- Participation in experiences where parents directly teach skills to children (formal literacy experiences).
- Having parents read aloud to children.
- Joint reading occurring between the parent and the child.
- Interactive activities (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985; Bennett, Weigel, & Martin, 2002; Bus, Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Haney & Hill, 2004; Sechenal & LeFevre, 2001).

The Emergent Reader and The Early Reader

Preschool children encounter different learning experiences before they enter school in kindergarten or grade 1. Despite their unique learning experiences, most young readers will typically fall into two main stages of literacy learners: the **emergent literacy** stage or the **early literacy** stage (Trehearne, Healy, & Cantalini-Williams, 2005). The majority of preschool children fall under the emergent literacy stage; however, there are some children who are more advanced and are classified as early readers.

It is important for parents to know and comprehend the characteristics, understandings, skills, and behaviours of a typical emergent and early literacy learner. This knowledge allows parents to determine the stage of their children's literacy level, in turn allowing them to gear their home literacy activities to their child's specific needs and abilities.

It should be noted that there may be overlap between the categories of the emergent literacy stage and the early literacy stage. In addition, it is possible that the child may display some of the characteristics, understandings, skills, and behaviours from both the emergent literacy stage as well as the early literacy stage. This is normal, and simply displays that all children are unique and learn differently. The charts on the following pages are designed as general overviews of an average child in the emergent literacy stage and in the early literacy stage.

The two charts outlining the emergent reader and early reader have been adapted from Trehearne et al.'s (2005) book, titled *Comprehensive Literacy Resource for Preschool Teachers.*

The Emergent Reader

Characteristics

- enjoys hearing and using new language
- shows pleasure in rhythm and rhyme of language
- enjoys trying to read
- likes to listen to stories, poems, and rhymes
- is willing to work at reading
- expects the text to make sense
- enjoys rereading books
- wants to read and see him/herself as a reader
- is confident when trying to read

Understandings

- knows that language can be recorded and revisited
- knows how stories and books work-understands that text and illustrations are important to the story
- is aware that the print in books has meaning to the story
- recognizes language from books and may use the words in daily speech and retellings of the story
- is aware of some print conventions
- is starting to become aware of the difference between fiction and nonfiction

Skills and Behaviours

- "plays" at reading
- handles books with confidence
- interprets pictures and uses them to predict text
- retells a story in the proper sequence
- is able to remember texts
- recognizes at least 10 letters from the alphabet
- finger-points when reading to locate specific words
- begins to discover that words are always spelt the same
- focuses on one word at a time
- is able to identify some words from the text
- explores new books and rereads favourite books
- chooses to "read" independently sometimes
- is able to recognize and read familiar signs, symbols, and labels
- enjoys sharing work and stories with others

Adapted from Trehearne et al. (2005)

The Early Reader

Characteristics

- desires to listen to and read longer texts
- is interested in reading for information as well as pleasure from a variety of texts
- expects to get meaning from texts
- enjoys exploring new words, language, and patterns in texts
- shows confidence in taking risks
- is able to read independently for longer time periods

Understandings

- displays greater knowledge of print conventions
- is able to associate sounds with individual letters or groups of letters
- accepts miscues as a part of trying to find meaning from texts
- understands that personal and imaginary experiences can influence the meaning from the books he/she reads
- rapid increase in vocabulary learned from reading

Skills and Behaviours

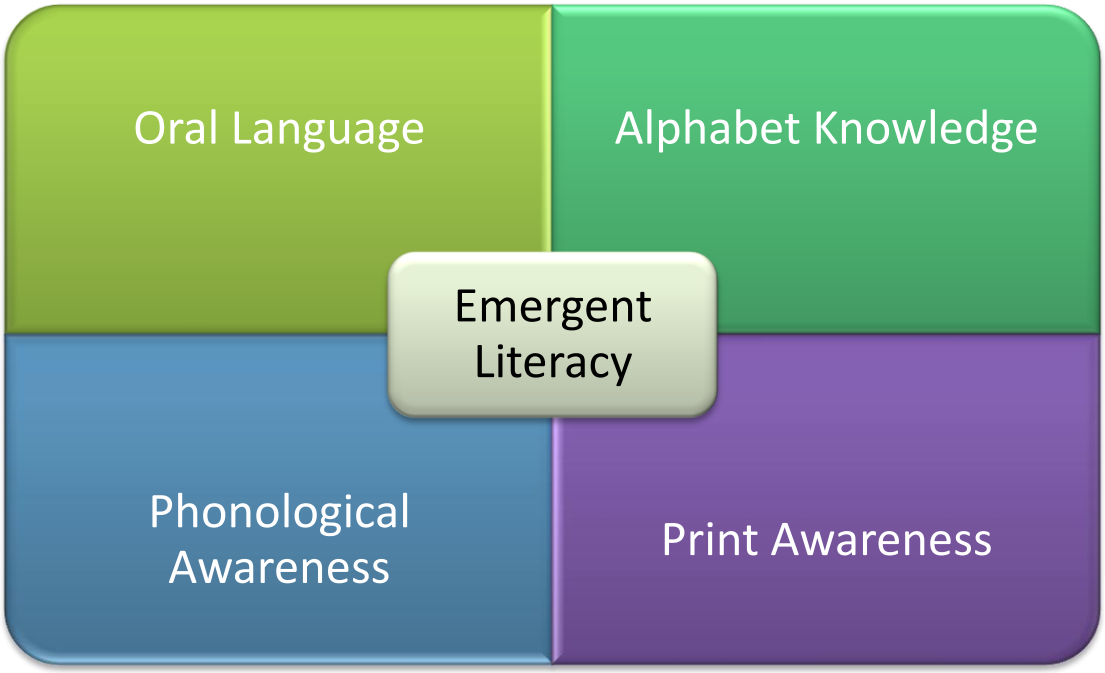
- uses the context of the story to make predictions
- is able to make more accurate predictions
- recognizes alphabet letters fluently
- uses letter-sound relationships as clues to the meaning
- selects and uses appropriate reading strategies more frequently
- uses illustrations to check for meaning rather than as a means of predicting
- continues to read and reread to gain meaning from texts
- confirms meaning by cross-checking known items
- chooses to read more frequently and builds up pace
- reads a variety of genres and forms of texts
- is able to cope with a greater number of characters, episodes, and different scenes

Adapted from Trehearne et al. (2005)

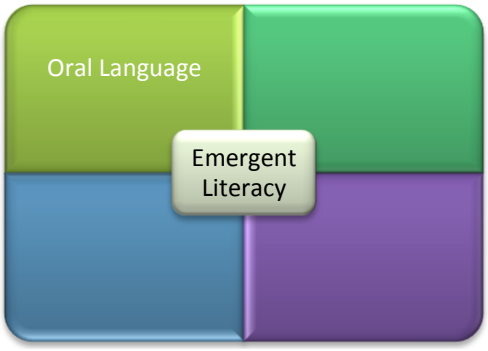
Essential Components of Emergent Literacy

Emergent literacy can be developed in preschool children by building a variety of specific skills. Each of these skills in combination with one another contributes to the preschool child's emergent literacy development. Research typically highlights four major skills which are found to contribute to emergent literacy development: oral language, alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and print awareness. (Anthony, Williams, McDonald, & Francis, 2007; Haney & Hill, 2004; Trehearne et al., 2005). In addition, each of these four skills is considered to be a strong predictor for children's future literacy development and reading achievement (Flynn, 2011; Saracho & Spodek, 2007; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Trehearne et al., 2005).

The following chart provides an overview of the four components that combine together to develop emergent literacy. Each of the four specific skills will be defined, discussed, and explained in the upcoming pages.



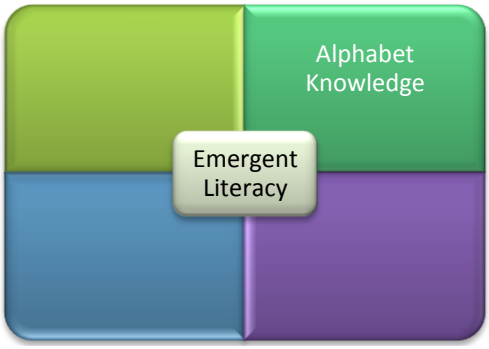
Section 2 of this handbook illustrates a variety of activities that parents can use at home to teach these four skills to their preschool children in order to assist in the development of emergent literacy.



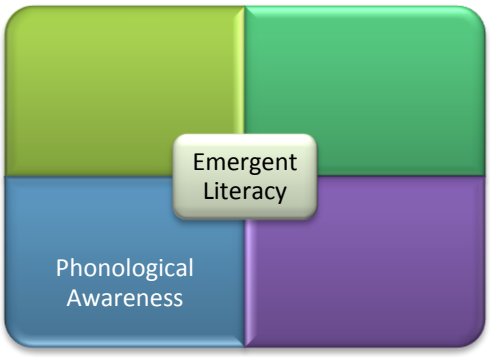
Oral Language

- Oral language is the spoken aspect of language that can be heard, interpreted, and understood (Haney & Hill, 2004).
- It involves both speaking as well as listening (Flynn, 2011).
- It is an essential skill for children to develop and use in all areas of school, in future jobs, while interacting with adults and peers, etc. (Trehearne et al., 2005).
- Social interaction is required to develop oral language (Flynn, 2011).
- Five characteristics of oral language include: **syntax** (grammar and sentence structure) , **phonology** (sounds), **discourse** (using different texts and contexts to gain meaning), **vocabulary** (words within a language), and **pragmatics** (meaning; Hill & Launder, 2010; Snow et al., 1998).

Alphabet Knowledge



- Alphabet knowledge involves having a knowledge of all the letters (upper case and lower case), being able to recognize the letters, and knowing the sounds that are associated with the letters (Drouin, Horner, & Sondergeld, 2012).
- Alphabet knowledge is a constrained skill because there are a limited number of elements to learn (Paris, 2005).
- It is a skill that children can completely master (Drouin et al., 2012).
- Children must have a knowledge of the letters of the alphabet to be able to read and write (Irwin et al., 2012; Trehearne et al., 2005).



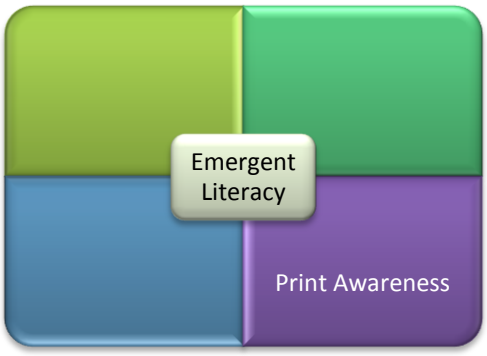
Phonological Awareness

- Phonological awareness is the sensitivity to the different sound units of language and the ability to manipulate the sound units (Lonigan, Burgess, Anthony & Barker, 1998; Snow, et al., 1998).

- Sound units consist of **syllables** (uninterrupted segment of speech containing a vowel), **phonemes** (smallest unit of sound used to form words, i.e., /s/, /t/, /a/), and **rhymes** (the repetition of similar sounds, usually at the end of the word; Anthony et al., 2007).

- Phonological awareness is developed in different developmental levels:
  - Word level (identify the individual words in a sentence)
  - Rhyme level (understand the concept of rhyme, recognize rhymes, and begin to generate rhyming words)
  - Syllable level (determine the number of syllables in words)
  - Sound level (isolate the beginning or ending sounds in words, identify and manipulate individual sounds)

Print Awareness



- Print awareness is described as being the forms, functions, and conventions of print (Lefebvre, Trudeau, & Sutton, 2011).

- Print referencing, where the adult uses verbal and nonverbal techniques to draw attention to forms, functions, and features of print, is a common technique used to improve print awareness (Lefebvre et al., 2011; Zucker, Ward, & Justice, 2009).

- Skills associated with developing print awareness include: knowing how to properly handle books, having an awareness of environmental print, understanding that print contains meaning, being able to identify book elements, and knowing the letters of the alphabet (Lefebvre et al., 2011).

The Home Literacy Environment

- The home literacy environment (HLE) is a term used to describe the exposure that children have in their homes to activities that assist in developing literacy.
- Home literacy environments play an important role in children's lives because it is in these environments that children are provided with their first encounters with literacy and language (Purcell-Gates, 1996; Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998).
- There are a variety of characteristics of the home literacy environment that relate to the development of literacy in the home. These characteristics can contribute to the child's literacy development in either a negative or positive way, depending on the family occurrences in the home:

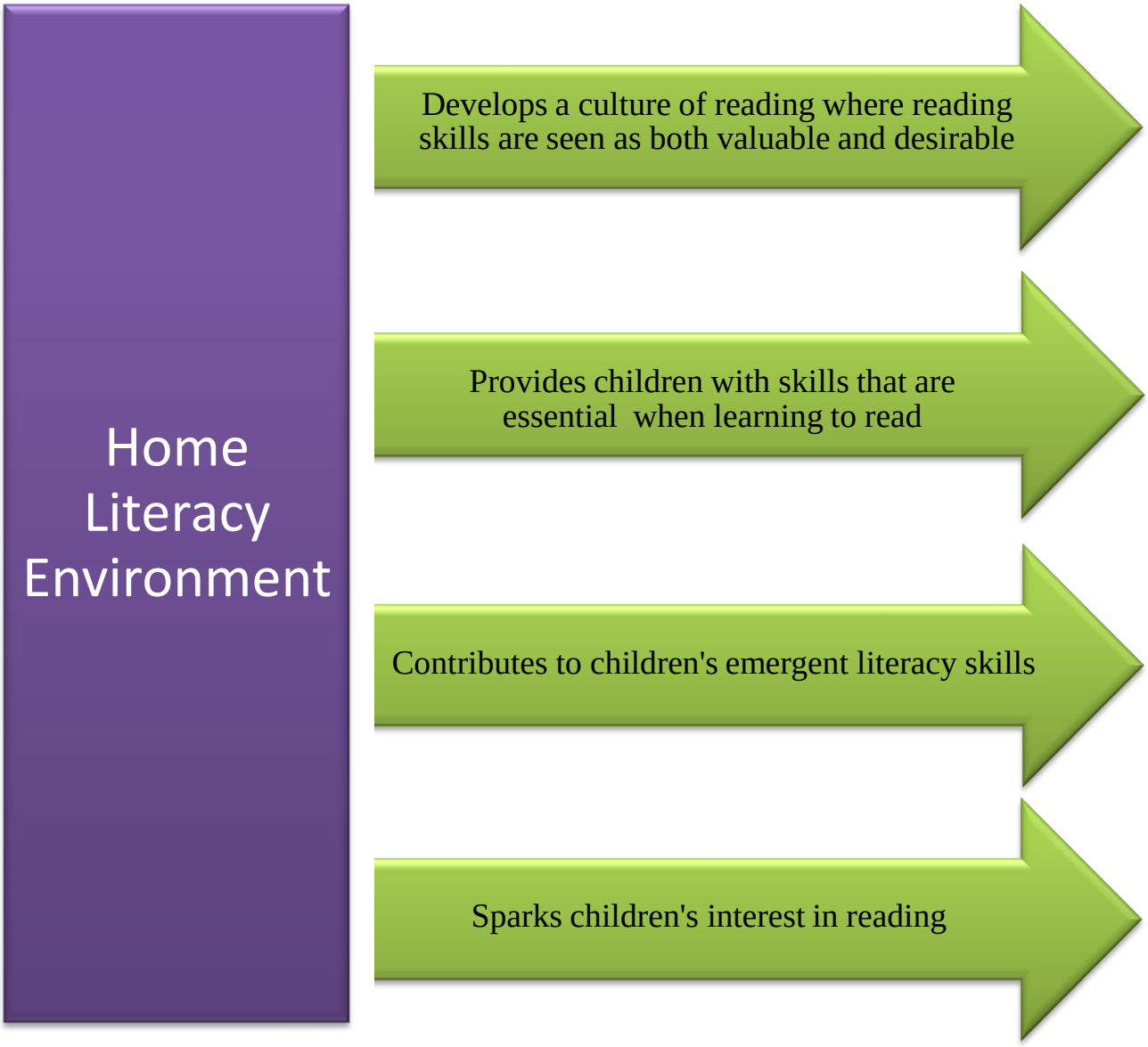
  - the variety of reading resources in the home
  - parental literacy levels, abilities, and skills
  - parental modeling of literacy behaviours
  - parent-child engagement in resources
  - opportunities provided to children to engage in literacy resources
  - parental attitudes
  - use of the library
  - parental literacy habits
  - family income
  - verbal references to literacy

(Burgess, 2011; Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan, 2002; Phillips & Lonigan, 2009; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002; Senechal et al., 1998; Snow et al., 1998; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

- Different characteristics of the home literacy environment influence the development of different literacy skills for children (Burgess et al., 2002; Senechal et al., 1998). This means that some characteristics of the home literacy environment will assist in developing some literacy skills but not others. Therefore, it is important that a variety of characteristics are positively emphasized in the home to ensure that children are developing many different literacy skills.
- Various studies have shown that the home environment can positively assist in developing children's emergent literacy abilities when there is an emphasized value placed on literacy and reading, when parents have positive beliefs towards literacy, and when the home environment is supportive for children (Bennett et al., 2002; Burgess, 1997; Senechal et al., 1998).

Home Literacy Environments & Children's Literacy Development

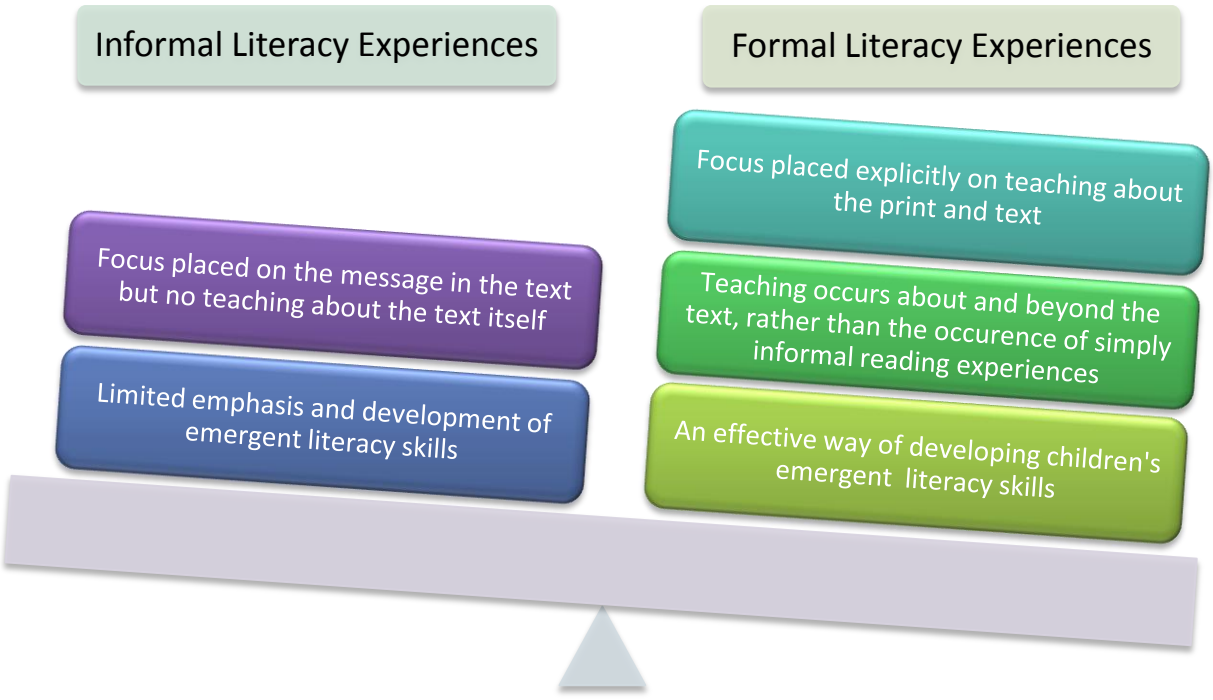
Research demonstrates that the home literacy environment is an important factor involved in the development of children's literacy (Kirby & Hogan, 2008). The following chart reveals some of the common benefits that positive home literacy environments can have on preschool children's literacy development.



Informal Instruction versus Formal Instruction

Literacy instruction in the home environment can take place in two ways: informal literacy instruction and formal literacy instruction. Informal literacy instruction can occur when parents are reading to children; however the focus is not on teaching the child about the text itself. The child is being exposed to the book and the story within the book, yet formal and purposeful instruction is not occurring (Senechal et al., 1998). On the other hand, formal literacy instruction occurs when the parent and child are interacting with the text with the intention of teaching the child specific literacy skills related to the text. The literacy experience allows for the parent to use the text as a means of teaching a variety of literacy skills to the child (Senechal et al., 1998).

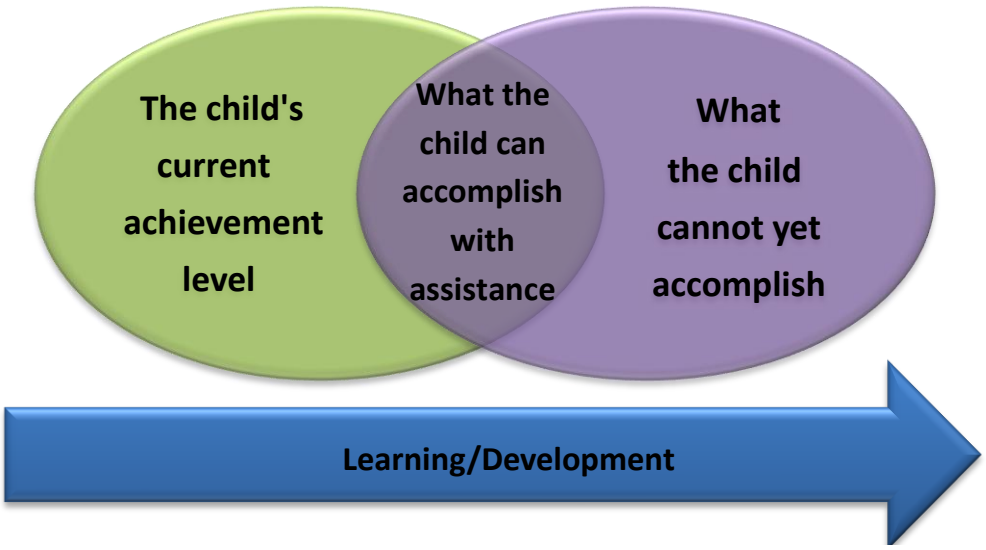
Overall, researchers have found that formal literacy instruction in the home is a more effective way of assisting children to develop emergent literacy skills than informal literacy instruction (Senechal & LeFevre, 2001; Senechal et al., 1998; Snow et al., 1991). It is important to note, however, that any form of literacy instruction, including informal literacy instruction, is better than if there is an absence of literacy instruction in the home (Snow et al., 1991).



Vygotsky: Zone of Proximal Development

- A well-known theorist named Lev Vygotsky developed the Social Constructivist Theory that illustrates the learning process as constructing knowledge while interacting with other, more knowledgeable people (Almasi & Garas-York, 2009).
- Vygotsky proposed an approach to learning called the **zone of proximal development**. The zone of proximal development is the distance between the child's current development and the child's potential development that can be achieved with support from others (Vygotsky, 1978b).
- Learning occurs in the child's zone of proximal development when the parent provides support to help cultivate the child's learning (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).
- Vygotsky defined this support as **scaffolding.** In the zone of proximal development the child receives appropriate leveled supports from the parent, dependent on the child's current abilities. When interacting with parents, the child is able to observe the adults' behaviours, internalize the learning process, and learn the material with assistance from the adults. Once the child has demonstrated learning, the scaffolds are slowly removed, allowing the child to apply and use the learning independently (Vygotsky, 1978a, 1978b).
- Therefore, parents' involvement in their preschool child's learning of emergent literacy skills is highly important. Parents are able to provide scaffolds that will assist in moving their child forward so that the child is able to obtain his or her potential level of literacy development.

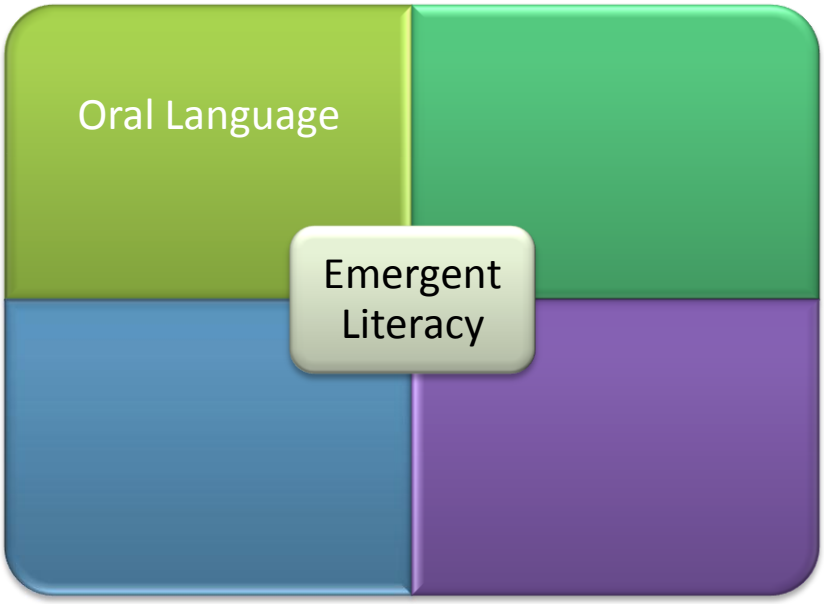
Zone of Proximal Development



SECTION 2:

Activities

Activities to Develop Oral Language



Activity 1: Dialogic Reading

After reading a book with the child once, the parent and child will reread the book a few more times, ensuring to revisit every page using the **PEER Sequence** and **CROWD prompts** associated with Dialogic Reading:

HOW TO USE The PEER Sequence:

P **Prompt** the child to identify items in the book and discuss them.
E **Evaluate** the child's response: using both praise statements and correction statements.
E **Expand** on the child's responses by rephrasing his or her ideas and adding additional information.
R **Repeat** the initial prompt to assess the child's understanding.

EXAMPLE of the PEER Sequence:

P "Let's look at this picture. What are the dogs doing?" (Wh-prompt)
E "Eating."
E "Yes, the dogs are eating their bones outside on the long grass." (Evaluate and Expand)
R "So, what are the dogs doing?" (Repeat)
"They are eating their bones outside."
"Yes, that's right. The dogs are both eating their bones outside on the grass." (Evaluate and Expand)

Dialogic Reading :

- Has been found to be highly successful in developing children's oral language skills (specifically expressive language; Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, Epstein, 1994; Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi, Cutting, 2006).
- Is an interactive form of reading instruction.
- The goal is for the child to step into the role of the active storyteller and the parents step back into the role of the facilitator.
- The adults guide and encourage the child to expand on ideas by using a variety of prompts and open-ended questions.
- Can be done in one-on-one settings, in small groups, or in classroom settings.

There are a variety of different prompts to use when participating in dialogic reading. The acronym, **CROWD**, illustrates the various prompts that can be used.

HOW TO USE The CROWD Prompts:

C **Completion Prompts:**
While reading, use the fill-in-the-blank technique: leave a blank in the sentence for the child to complete.
EXAMPLE: The girl is leaving with her _____.
R **Recall Prompts:**
Ask questions to encourage the child to recall specific details from the book.

EXAMPLE: Do you remember what gifts the boy received for his birthday?

O Open-ended Prompts:

Use open-ended questions to encourage the child to consider specific details and think deeper about the book.

EXAMPLE: Tell me about this page. What do you think the boy really wants to do?

W Wh-Prompts:

Use **what, where, when,** and **why** questions to teach new vocabulary and draw the child's attention to details in the book.

EXAMPLE: (Point to the girl.) Why does the girl look so excited? What does it mean to be excited?

D Distancing Prompts:

Ask questions to make connections between the words and the pictures in the text to the child's personal experiences.

EXAMPLE: Have you ever been to a birthday party? What did you do at the party? How do you think the boy felt after spending his day with his friends at his birthday party?

(Adapted from Blom-Hoffman et al., 2006; Trehearne et al., 2005)

Activity 2: Story Map

Creating a story map is an excellent way for children to develop oral language. It is beneficial to create a story map immediately after reading a book so that the child is able to recall details from the story.

HOW TO CREATE A Story Map:

- Read a story with the child.
- After reading the story, the parent asks the child to explain or identify the various elements from the story:
  - Title and Author
  - Main Characters
  - Other Characters
  - Setting (Time and Place)
  - What happened at the Beginning, Middle, and End of the story
  - The major Theme or Problem
  - Solution
- The parent records the child's ideas in the story map (with the help of the child).

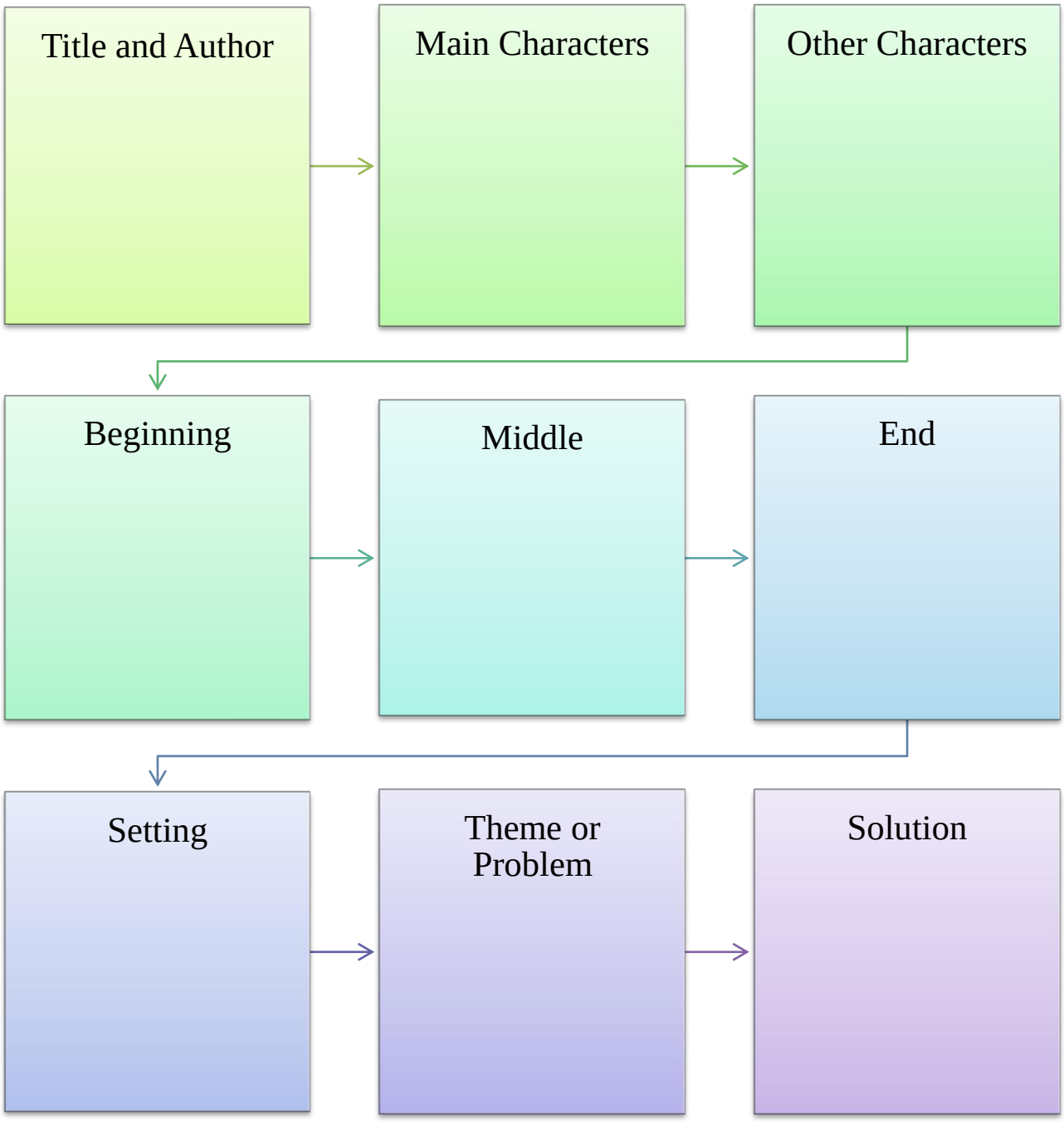
Story Maps:

- A way to organize important information from a book.
- Provides children with an opportunity to recall the information from the book and express his or her ideas orally.
- Allows children to be able to visualize the main ideas in a simple way.
- Can be used to assist in oral story retelling at another time.

Note: The following page includes one possible format that may be used to create a story map. However, any format can be used to create a story map.

(Adapted from Trehearne et al., 2005)

Story Map Template



Activity 3: Oral Story Retelling

Oral story retelling is an activity which can be done after the parent and child have read a story together. If the child has already created a story map from the previous activity, it can be used to assist the child in this activity.

HOW TO Retell the story:

- Summarize/retell the main ideas from the story in your own words.
- Consider discussing,
  - Setting (Time and Place)
  - The Characters
  - The main Theme or Problem of the story
  - Major Events that occurred in sequence (Beginning, Middle, End)
  - The Solution to the Problem

Oral Story Retelling:

- A way to monitor and assess children's comprehension of the story.
- Provides children with an opportunity to recall the important information from the book, and then demonstrate their understanding through retelling the story in their own words.
- A beneficial skill for children to begin learning during preschool years because retelling and summarizing are skills children will further develop all throughout school.

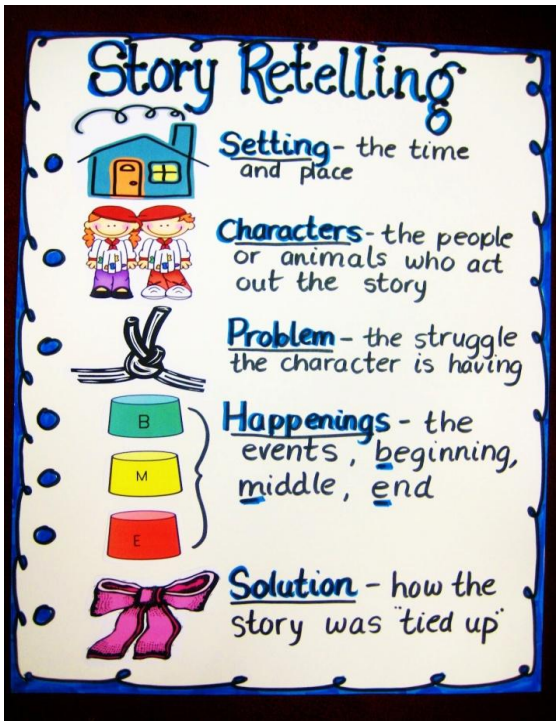
In order to provide appropriate scaffolding and supports to the child, it is beneficial for the parent to first model an example of how to retell a story for the child. After an example has been provided, the child can practice retelling the story.

On top of the traditional oral story retelling, various oral story retelling activities can be used to engage the child in the process of retelling:

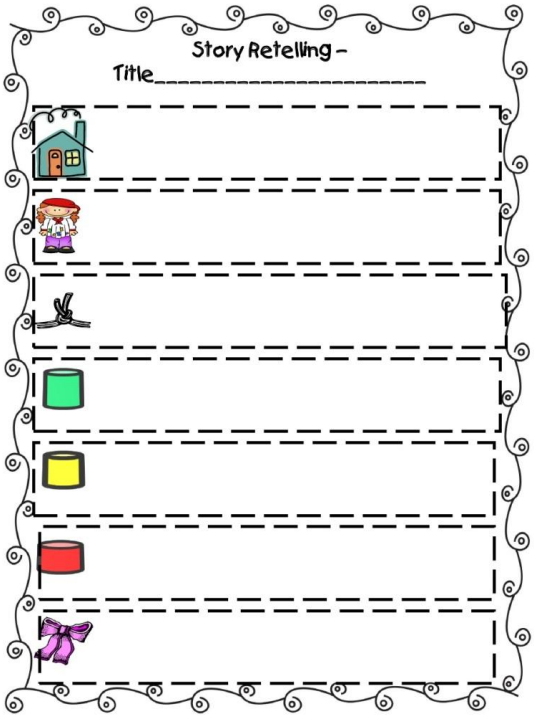
- Provide the child with puppets or give him or her supplies to create his or her own puppets to represent the characters in the story. Using the puppets, the child can retell the story in his or her own words.
- Use various dolls, action figures, or toys to retell the story. These objects/toys can play the roles of the characters in the story.
- Provide the child with supplies to draw pictures to create a story board to represent the most important events from the beginning, middle, and end of the story.
- Have students create a "retelling rope" with the different symbols used to represent the parts of the story (Vandenberge, 2012).

  Refer to the following page for an example of a "retelling rope," an anchor chart to help children remember what should be included in their retelling, and a worksheet to write down the parts of the story.

Oral Story Telling: Retelling Rope



(Vandenberge, 2012)



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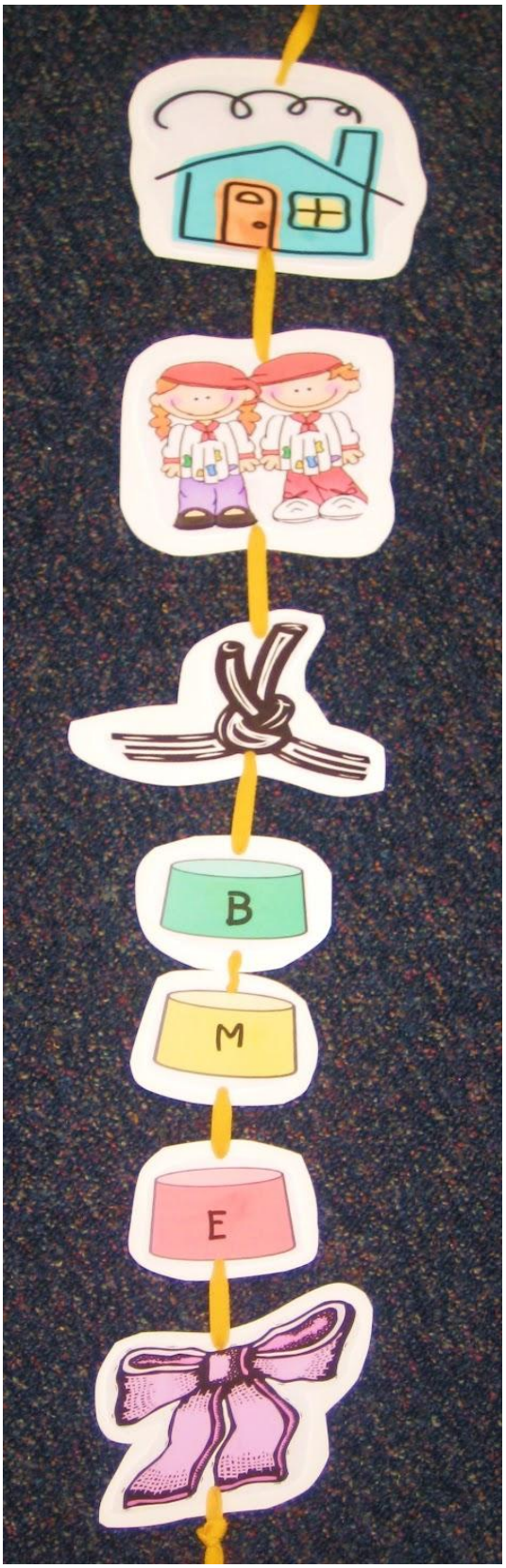


(Vandenberge, 2012)

Activity 4: T.V. Talk

The television can be used as a valuable tool in an activity such as T.V. Talk to provide opportunities for discussion to help in developing children's oral literacy. The key to using the television as an effective tool to develop oral literacy is to ensure that children are talking about what they are watching before, during, and after the television show.

In order to effectively engage in T.V. Talk, it is essential that parents take an active role in facilitating the discussion with the child and asking meaningful questions that encourage the child to talk about what was seen in the television show.

HOW TO DO T.V. Talk:

Before the television show:

- Have the children make predictions about what the story is about based on the title and opening scene.
- If it is a regular show that the child watches, ask the child to recall what happened in the previous episode.

During the television show:

- Ask the child to predict what will happen following an important or exciting part of the story.
- Ask the child to explain the meaning of various words that are spoken in the show.

After the television show:

- Ask the child to explain what the show was about.
- Have the child describe his/her favourite part of the show.
- Ask the child to talk about the characters:
    - What types of feelings did they display?
    - What did they look like?
    - What kind of persons are they?
    - What do they enjoy doing?
    - Has the child every done something or acted in a way that was similar to a character from the show?
- Act out a scene together from the show.
- Ask the child to make up an ending that is different from the ending on the show.

(Adapted from American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2013)

T. V. Talk:

- Similar to Oral Story Retelling, simply using television shows instead of books.
- A way to encourage children to think about television shows as stories, similar to books, just in a different format.
- Provides children with an opportunity to recall the important information from the television show and then talk about various elements of the story with parents.
- Allows children to reflect on the story from the television show, think about the elements of the story in a deeper way, and make connections between the story and their own lives.

Activity 5: KWLM Chart

A KWLM Chart can be used by the parent and child during the reading time to encourage the child to think deeper about the ideas in the book and express these ideas in a simple way.

The process of completing a KWLM Chart takes place before and after reading a book. The parent should be the facilitator asking the questions to the child, and the child should be doing the majority of the talking when answering the questions about the book.

KWLM Chart:

- A simple way of organizing information about topics found in books.
- Encourages children to activate prior knowledge that they have about the topic of the book.
- Encourages children to set goals for their learning.
- Encourages children to be reflective of their learning.

HOW TO CREATE A KWLM Chart:

Before reading the book,

- Look at the cover and title to brainstorm what the child thinks the book might be about.
- Brainstorm what the child already knows about the topic of the book.
- Discuss with the child what he/she wants to learn in regards to the topic.

Read the book to/with the child.

After reading the book,

- Discuss what the child learned from the book.
- Discuss what information the child wants to learn more about for future learning, activities, and/or reading.

Refer to following page for a template of a KWLM Chart.

(Adapted from Trehearne et al., 2005 & Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2013)

KWLM Chart Template

What We KNOW	What We WANT to Learn	What We LEARNED	What MORE We Want To Learn

Activity 6: Telephone Play

Telephone play is an activity that can be used after reading a book to provide children with an opportunity to talk about the book. It can also be used in everyday play, allowing them to participate in discussion with the adult or other children involved.

The activity requires the use of two toy phones or non-working real phones. The child and parent can also create a telephone booth for a child to sit in using a cardboard box.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE in Telephone Play:

- Have the parent make a pretend phone call to the child or have the child call the parent (phone calls can also be made between two children).

- Talk to the child about the book they just read:
  - Ask the child to explain what happened in the story.
  - Ask the child to describe the characters.
  - Ask the child to make predictions about what may happen after the story.
  - Ask the child questions that make connections between the story and the child's life.

OR

- Talk to the child about any topic such as:
  - What objects the child sees in the room,
  - What he or she ate for lunch,
  - What he or she did on the weekend,
  - The child's favourite toy or television show.

(Adapted from Project ELIPSS, 2006)

Telephone Play:

- A fun way to encourage children to participate in oral conversations.
- The ability to communicate with others and demonstrate conversational language is an important aspect of oral language.
- Encourages children to apply their oral language skills in a real-life activity.
- Assists children in practicing speaking with adults and other children.
- Assists children in practicing to speak clearly, use appropriate words to explain themselves, and to speak at an appropriate volume.

Activity 7:
A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words

A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words is an activity that involves the use of a various images such as photographs, postcards, and posters.

The parent allows the child to choose a picture of his or her choice. The parent encourages the child to take some time to carefully look at the image. Once the child has looked at the picture, the parent asks the child to verbally answer various questions about the image.

HOW TO ANALYZE a picture:

Consider general questions such as,

- What is happening in the image?
- Who is in the image?
- Where might the image take place?
- About what time of day is it in the image?

Consider specific questions such as,

- What is this person doing?
- Why do you think he/she is doing that?
- What is this object used for?
- This person looks sad. What tells you that he or she is sad?
- What colours can you see in the image?

A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words:

- An activity that assists to develop children's expressive language.
- An interactive way for children to participate in oral conversations with other people.
- Encourages children to reflect on photographs and orally share their ideas with others.
- Allows children to make associations between images and the words that are used to describe the images.
- Gives children the opportunity to participate in a discussion with parents and other children.

The parent's job is to facilitate the conversation, continuously prompting the child to expand on his/her ideas and orally answer the questions to the best of his/her abilities.

(Adapted from American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2013)

Activity 8: Clue

Clue is an interactive activity that allows children to take on the role of a word detective. Clue can be done in any setting. Parents can provide clues that are relevant to the current place that they are in, allowing the child to also see a visual representation of the words.

HOW TO PLAY Clue:

- The parent provides the child with a description or clue about a word.
  - EXAMPLE: "You use this to clean your teeth."
- The child's job is to say the word that fits the clue.
  - EXAMPLE: "A toothbrush."

If the child does not provide the correct answer to the parent's clue, then the parent can add to the original clue, providing the child with more detail. The child continues to guess the word that the adult is describing until the child gets the correct word.

Some EXAMPLES of the clues that parents could use in this activity include:

- Parent: "It is cold, sweet, and good to eat for dessert. Your favourite is chocolate."
  Child: "Ice cream."
- Parent: "It has four legs, fur, a tail, and whiskers."
  Child: "A rabbit."
  Parent: "Not quite. It also has short ears and makes this sound: meow."
  Child: "A cat."
- Parent: "We place our food on this when we eat. It is flat on the top and has four legs."
  Child: "A table."

(Adapted from American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2013)

Clue:

- An activity that assists in developing children's oral language.
- Assists children's growing knowledge of the meaning of various words.
- Allows children to make associations between common words that they know and the meaning of the words.
- Allows children to see how the words that they know are relevant to the real world.

Activity 9: Shop and Talk

Shop and Talk is an activity that allows children to continue developing their oral language while outside of the house and shopping with their parents.

Shopping for items such as groceries, clothes, and other household items would be effective to use for this activity.

HOW TO Shop and Talk:

- The parent takes on the role of the active facilitator leading the discussion about the items in the store.
  - EXAMPLES of discussion prompts :
    - Discuss what items to buy.
    - Name the items that are seen in the store.
    - How many items do we need to buy?
      - What are the shapes of the items.
      - What are the sizes of the items.
      - Are the packages light or heavy?
    - What you will use the purchased items for?
      - What are other ways that you could use the item?
    - Where you will keep the items in the house?
    - What other items are used or associated with the purchased item?
- As children begin talking about items in the store, the parent should continue to encourage the child to:
  - Expand on his or her ideas to provide as much detail as possible.
  - Further add to his or her ideas if something relates to another item in the store.
  - Make connections between items in the store and the child's personal interests.

Shop and Talk:

- An activity that assists in developing children's expressive language.
- Adds to children's growing knowledge of words and their meanings.
- Allows children to make associations between the objects and the words that represent the objects.
- Allows children to be able to see real life examples of words in their vocabulary.

(Adapted from American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2013)

Activity 10: Word Web

Creating a Word Web can be done about topics from books or any topic of the child's choice. It is important to note that Word Webs can be used before reading the book and also after reading the book.

- Creating a Word Web before reading the book provides an introduction to the book for the child, allows the child to predict what will happen in the book, and allows for the child to demonstrate his or her prior knowledge surrounding the topic.
- Creating a Word Web after reading the book provides the child with an opportunity to summarize the information from the text and expand on ideas found in the text.

HOW TO CREATE A Word Web:

- Choose the main topic from the story to use as the center of the web (EXAMPLE: pets).
- Have the child brainstorm what he or she already knows about that topic.
  - Write the ideas or draw pictures to represent the ideas in a web format, surrounding the main idea in the middle (EXAMPLE: dogs, cats, hamsters, fish).
- Looking specifically at the ideas in the web, think of other words that are associated or related with that word.
  - Write these additional ideas outside the main idea to demonstrate the connections that these words have to the other words. (EXAMPLE: dog = bone, tail, water, walk, paws).
- Continue to add to the web with more and more detail to help illustrate the meanings of the words/topics from the texts.

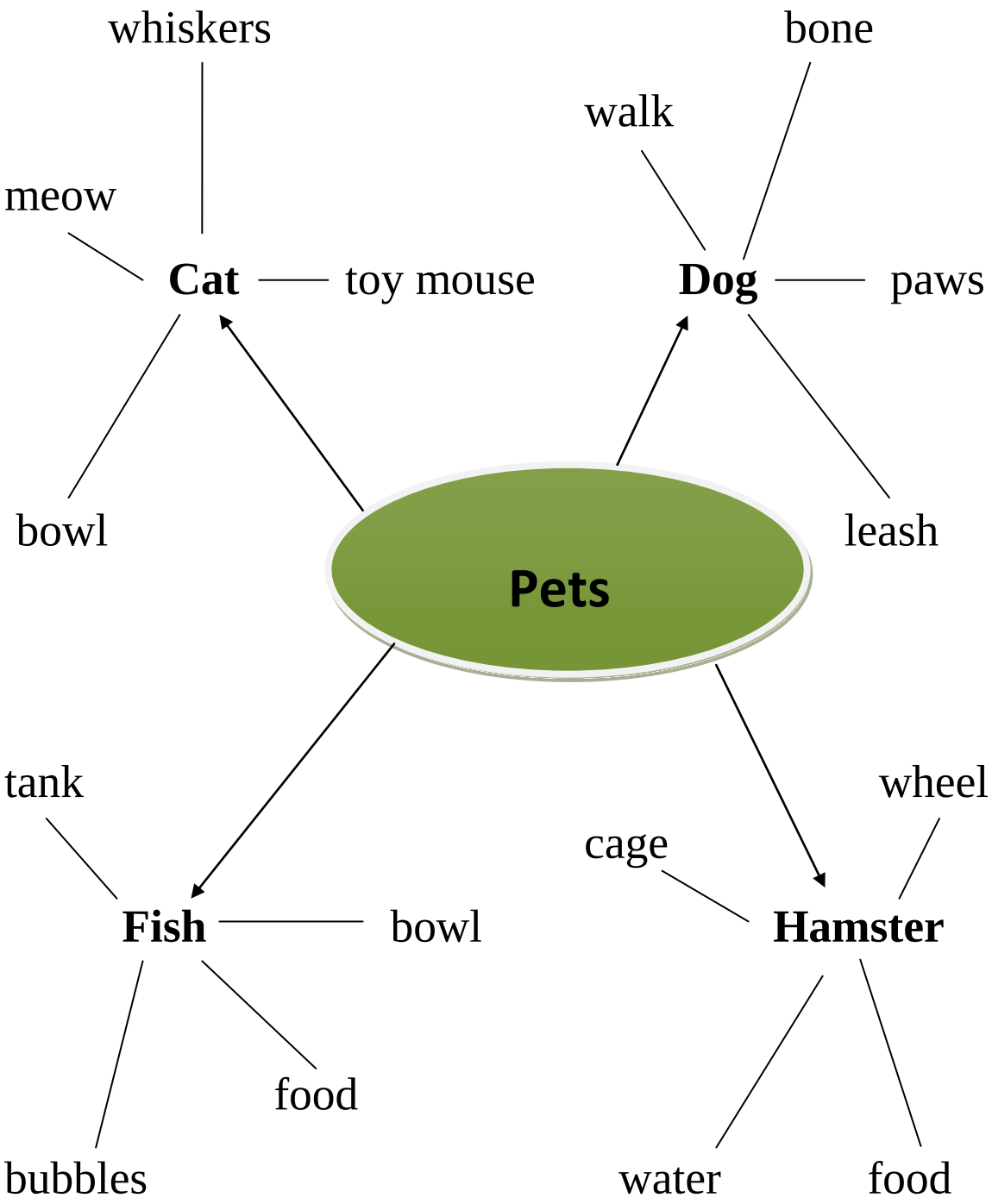
Refer to the following page for an example of a Word Web.

(Adapted from Trehearne et al., 2005)

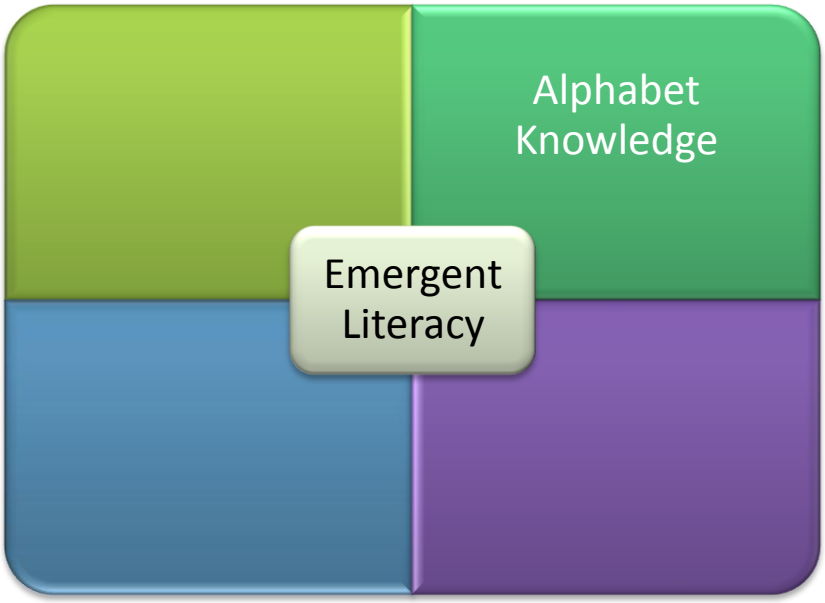
Word Web:

- A brainstorming activity that assists to develop children's vocabulary and knowledge about word meanings.
- Provides children with an opportunity to demonstrate their prior knowledge about a topic.
- Allows children to be able to draw connections between words and information that they know about the topic.
- Allows children to be able to visualize the connections between various words related to a specific topic.
- An effective brainstorming tool that allows children to organize their ideas in a simple way.

Word Web Example



Activities to Develop Alphabet Knowledge



Activity 1: Bulletin Board

Bulletin boards are great ways to display the alphabet for children who are learning the letters of the alphabet.

When creating an alphabet bulletin board parents should ensure that they display upper case and lower case letters by themselves. Allow the child to focus on learning the upper case letters first and then learn the lower case letters once the child is confident with the upper case letters. This method is encouraged because children are typically able to recognize upper case letters easier than lower case letters (Drouin et al., 2012).

HOW TO CREATE an Alphabet Bulletin Board:

- Divide the bulletin board into 26 sections.
- Choose a background: either colourful, white, or black.
- Clearly print out or write out the 26 upper case letters of the alphabet on paper.
    - Different coloured paper may be used for each letter when using a white or black background.
    - Black letters may be used if the background of the bulletin board is colourful.
- With the child's help, attach the 26 letters onto the bulletin board in the correct order (A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J,K,L,M,N,O,P,Q,R,S,T,U,V,W,X,Y,Z).
- Have the child attach an image under the corresponding beginning letter for each letter on the bulletin board. This will help the child to make connections between the letters that are used in the words that they know. The images can be created using cut-outs from magazines, photos, cereal boxes, newspapers, images from the internet, or images drawn by the child (EXAMPLE: An image of a dog would be placed under D).
- As the child learns new words, images of these words can be added under the corresponding letter on the bulletin board.

(Adapted from Trehearne et al., 2005)

Bulletin Board:

- Effective ways to display children's work, notes, images, important information, and alphabet letters.
- A space that children can refer to when reading and learning the alphabet letters.
- Allows children to see a visual image of the letters.
- Allows children to make connections between the letters that they are learning and words that they know that begin with the same letter.

Activity 2: Alphabet Books

Reading alphabet books to children is an excellent way to introduce them to the letters of the alphabet.

Alphabet books are typically simple books that present the letters of the alphabet to children while also including words and/or images that share the letter being described. Some alphabet books incorporate only upper case letters, only lower case letters, or both. Alphabet books vary from including only simple sentences or phrases, to longer paragraphs. The focus of both types is to highlight the letter being emphasized and the corresponding words or images.

HOW TO READ an Alphabet Book to ensure that the child has an interactive role in the reading:

Alphabet Books:

- Provides children with opportunities to see the letters of the alphabet in a book format.
- Allows children to hear the pronounciation of the letters while reading the book.
- Allows children to see the connection between the letters and the sounds made by the letters.

- The parent can begin by modeling how to read the letters and words to the child.
- Once the child has heard the letters being read, the child can have the opportunity to repeat the letters and words with the adult, and then eventually read them by themselves.
- The parent's gradual release of responsibility allows the child to develop confidence in reading and recognizing the letters at a pace that they are comfortable with.

There are a large variety of alphabet books that are available for preschool children. The following is a brief list of alphabet books that parents may choose to use when teaching children the letters of the alphabet. However, parents should not be limited to this list, as there are many more excellent alphabet books available for use.

Dr. Seuss's ABC (1963) by Dr Seuss
The Alphabet Book (1974) by P. D. Eastman
Eric Carle's ABC (2007) by Eric Carle
How to Build an A (2008) by Sara Midda
An A to Z Walk in the Park (2008) by R. M. Smith
Alphabet Under Construction (2006) by Denise Fleming
Baby Einstein: First Alphabet Book (2011) by Marcy Kelman
Alphabet Mystery (2003) by Audrey Wood & Bruce Wood
Curious George's ABCs (1998) by H. A. Rey

Activity 3: Alphabet Songs

Incorporating music and singing into teaching alphabet knowledge is a great way to get children engaged and involved in learning the letters of the alphabet.

HOW TO USE Songs:

- The alphabet song is the most basic way to incorporate music and learning the letters of the alphabet. The alphabet song involves singing the letters of the alphabet from A to Z in the tune of Twinkle Twinkle, Little Star.

    - When singing the alphabet song with children it is beneficial to write out the letters of the alphabet and encourage the child to follow the letters as they are being sung. This will help children make connections between the name of the letters and what the letters look like. Singing the alphabet song slowly while pointing to the written letters is also beneficial because it allows children to see/hear each of the individual letters. This technique helps to avoid the common problem of children singing l-m-n-o as one group of letters(elemeno).

Alphabet Songs:

- Singing is an engaging way to help children remember the letters of the alphabet.
- Provides children with an interactive way to practice naming the letters of the alphabet
- Assists children in remembering the order of the letters of the alphabet.

- B-I-N-G-O is a song that combines singing individual letters of a word, the entire word, and other words that support the story of the song. This song can be sung in the classic B-I-N-G-O tune, or it can also be adapted to tell another story and spell out a variety of different words:

There was a farmer
who had a dog
and BINGO was his name-O.
B-I-N-G-O
B-I-N-G-O
B-I-N-G-O
And BINGO was her name-O.

There was a doctor
who had a bird
and POLLY was her name-O.
P-O-L-L-Y
P-O-L-L-Y
P-O-L-L-Y
And POLLY was her name-O.

(Adapted from Trehearne et al., 2005)

Activity 4: Shared Reading

Reading books and looking at books with children are great ways to help develop children's knowledge of the letters of the alphabet.

When deciding what books to read with the child, ensure to:

- Choose a book that the child is interested in.
- Choose a book that has a combination of words and pictures to keep the child engaged during the reading time.
- Choose a book that is at the appropriate level and/or age range for the child.

HOW TO ENSURE that Shared Reading is beneficial for the child's learning:

- Read and reread books multiple times to help in the child's development of alphabet knowledge. Repetition is a good way to help the child learn the names of the letters and what the letters look like.
    - Children generally enjoy rereading favourite books because they become familiar with the story and characters - enjoyment is important!
- Before reading the book, explain to the child that he or she will be looking closely at some words and letters while reading.
    - Choose a few target words and target letters that you will be focusing on during the reading time, and show the child a written example of both.
    - Ensure to choose target words that are commonly used throughout the story.

Shared Reading:

- An instructional strategy that can be used to help children learn how to read by developing vocabulary knowledge (Snow et al., 1998).
- The interaction that occurs between a parent and child when they are reading or looking at a book together.
- Active engagement and involvement in the book reading by the parent and child is essential.
- Provides children with the opportunity to hear a proficient reader read a variety of words.

- While reading the book, interrupt the story when the target words and letters appear.
    - EXAMPLES: "Show me the letter *P* in this word," or "Can you put your finger on the letter *G* in this word?"; "This word says *CAT*, can you say *CAT*?"; "This word looks familiar. What is this word?"; "How many letters are in the word *CAT*?"; "Can you name the letters that are in the word *CAT*?"
        - Ensure to encourage and provide praise for all attempts and correct responses that the child provides.
        - If the child is unable to provide the correct answer, provide assistance.

These strategies can be used multiple times with the same book, each time focusing on different target words and letters. Participating in shared reading allows the child to be introduced to many or all of the 26 letters in the alphabet in a nonthreatening way. This activity can be used with a variety of different books, and the child's participation can increase as he/she becomes more comfortable with the letters.

(Adapted from Ezell & Justice, 2005)

Activity 5: Alphabet Art

Alphabet art is an activity that allows children to practice writing the letters of the alphabet in a way that is fun and engaging for them. The more creative the child gets, the better.

HOW TO DO Alphabet Art in a variety of creative ways:

- Provide the child with paint and allow him or her to paint a picture, including his or her name on the picture.
- Encourage the child to paint a picture that includes as many letters as he/she can.
- Have the child paint or draw a picture and then write the first letter of the image on the picture. If the child is able to write the whole word have him or her write the entire word that describes the image that he or she drew.
- Using paints, crayons, or pencil crayons, have the child create a picture using only one colour. Have the child write the first letter of the colour that he or she used on the picture. If the child is able, have him or her write the entire word of the colour that was used.
- Create letters using a variety of objects such as uncooked pasta, raisins, candles, clay, pebbles, cotton balls, small change, play-dough, etc.
- Provide the child with play dough and encourage him or her to mould the letters of his or her name, or the first letter of the child's favourite food, or the first letter of the child's favourite game. After the child has created the letters, have the child use the play dough to mould the object that relates to the letters (P = Pizza, I = Ice cream, S = Soccer).

Alphabet Art:

- Provides children with an opportunity to incorporate and use letters in their art work.
- Allows children to practice writing out the alphabet letters.
- Allows children to see a visual representation of the letters in a creative way.

(Adapted from Pittman, 2012; Trehearne et al., 2005)

Activity 6: Alphabet Body Shapes

Physically creating the letters of the alphabet using children's entire bodies is a fun way to bring the alphabet letters to life. In order to complete this activity children must be aware of what the letters looks like and how they are formed. Children take their knowledge and apply it to an interactive activity where they are using their bodies to create the letters instead of writing it on paper.

HOW TO CREATE Alphabet Body Shapes:

Depending on the children's creativity, the letters can be created in pairs, or in small groups.

EXAMPLE:

- C - individual
- L, V, T, D, G, J, P, Q, R, S, U, X - partners
- A, B, F, H, I, K, N, Y, Z - three people
- E, M, W - four people

- After the children have created the letter(s) the parent can take a picture so that the children can see what their letter(s) looks like.

- Once all of the letters have been created and photographed, the children are encouraged to identify each of the letters.

- The child can also look at the image of the letter created by their bodies and then write the letter out on paper to practice the transfer of the letter on paper, to their bodies, and back to paper.

Alphabet Body Shapes:

- Requires children to look at a letter and recreate the same letter in a different way.
- Allows children to work together and use problem solving skills to figure out how to create the letters of the alphabet with their bodies.
- Allows children to experience/see a visual representation of the letters in a creative way.

(Adapted from Trehearne et al., 2005)

Activity 7: Tactile Letters

Tactile Letters is an activity where children and parents create the 26 letters of the alphabet out of a variety of different textures and materials.

HOW TO CREATE Tactile Letters:

- Children can choose to make 3-dimensional letters or 2-dimensional letters:
  - 3-dimensional letters would involve using textured materials to create the letters as a real object.
  - 2-dimensional letters would involve drawing the letters on paper and applying the textured materials on the surface of the letters.
- Some EXAMPLES of different materials and textures that can be used include sand paper, velvet, satin, cardboard, cloth, wool, canvas, play-dough, sand, or any other material with a texture that is unique or distinct.
- Once the different tactile letters are created the children will use their hands to feel all of the letters (tracing the shapes of the letters with their fingers) while also saying the name of the letter out loud. This allows the child to make an association between the name of the letter and the shape/feel of the letter.

Tactile Letters:

- Helps to reinforce the visual representation and shapes of the letters.
- Allows children to see and feel a visual and tactile representation of the letters in a creative and memorable way.

(Adapted from Clay, 1991; Smith, 1986; Trehearne et al., 2005)

Activity 8: Pictionary

Pictionary is an activity that allows the child to practice matching letters to images that begin with the same letter. In order to participate in this activity the parent and child will need to use a white board, chalk board, or a sheet of paper. A white or black board is useful to have when doing a lot of drawing and erasing.

Pictionary:

- Allows children to make associations between letters and images that begin with the letters.
- Provides children with visual respresentations to help them remember what letters are used to make words that they know.

HOW TO PLAY Pictionary:

During this activity the child's goal is to be able to draw an image that begins with the same letter as the letter given to the child by the parent.

- The parent writes a letter on the white or black board.
- The child draws an image that corresponds with the letter.
- The child states what they drew and what letter the image begins with.
  - EXAMPLE: The child is given the letter S and the child draws a SUN. The child then explains that he/she drew a sun, and says that SUN begins with the letter S.
- The parent then says the individual letters in the word and the child writes the letters that the parent says on the black or white board.
  - EXAMPLE: The parent says S-U-N, and the child writes SUN.

HOW TO MODIFY Pictionary:

- The activity can also be reversed where the adult draws an object or says it out loud, and the child's goal is to write out the letter that the image begins with.
  - EXAMPLE: The parent draws an image of a flower, and the child writes and says the letter F.
- If the child gets the letter correct, the parent says all of the letters in the word out loud and the child writes the letters that the parent says on the white or black board.
  - EXAMPLE: The parent says F-L-O-W-E-R, and the child writes FLOWER.

This activity can be done with all of the letters in the alphabet, and the parent can encourage the child to use different images every time the activity is done.

Activity 9: Nosy Letters

Nosy Letters is an activity that works well in the kitchen or outside. These locations are best because they typically contain a variety of items with distinct smells.

HOW TO DO Nosy Letters:

- The parent's role is to find an item with a distinct aroma and have the child guess what the item is.
  - EXAMPLES of items that can be used in the kitchen include bananas, strawberries, oranges, pizza, juice, popcorn, apples, tacos, chili, coffee, etc.
  - EXAMPLES of items that can be used from outside include a variety of flowers, grass, soil, wood, etc.
- The child's role is to close his or her eyes, describe the smell, and use his/ her nose to predict what the item is.
  - EXAMPLE: It smells sweet, spicy, stinky, etc.
- Once the child predicts the name of the smelly object the child says and writes the first letter of that word. The parent can then print the entire word, articulating each and every letter in the word as it is written.
  - EXAMPLE: I smell an Orange. Orange begins with the letter O. The child writes the letter O and the parent prints the other letters to complete the word (ORANGE)
- Once the parent has written the word, the child's job is to copy the parent's writing and write the word by him/herself under the parent's word, saying every letter out loud as he/she writes it.
  - EXAMPLE: The child looks at the word ORANGE and writes ORANGE while saying the individual letters in the word.

Nosy Letters:

- Allows children to make conections between letters and words that begin with the letters.
- Provides children with an opportunity to use their sense of smell to help them remember letters and items that begin with the letter.

(Adapted from Dodge, Berke, Colker, Heroman, & Jones, 2012; Trehearne et al., 2005)

Activity 10: Trace 'N' Write

Trace 'N' Write is an activity that can be done using paper or a white board. The white board is simply a more engaging way to practice tracing and writing letters than if it is done on paper.

HOW TO DO Trace 'N' Write:

- The parent writes a letter on the white board and asks the child to read what the letter is. Once the child has identified the letter, he or she traces the letter made by the parent with a marker or pencil.
    - EXAMPLE: The parent writes a letter T. The child reads that it is a T. The child traces over the letter T.
- After the child has traced the letter the next step is to have the child write the letter by himself or herself. The parent encourages the child to refer to the original letter to help remember the proper way to form the letter.
    - EXAMPLE: The child writes the letter T by himself/herself.
- The parent and child can go through all of the 26 letters of the alphabet in this manner. Once the child has mastered writing the individual letters, the parent can begin to write simple words. The same process will occur (the child identifies the letters/word, traces the letters in the word, and then writes the word independently).

Trace 'N' Write:

- Provides children with an opportunity to practice writing letters and words.
- Tracing the letters allows children to follow the shape of the letters, and feel how the letters are formed.
- Writing the letters immediately after tracing the letters gives the children an opportunity to apply what they know about the formation of letters and practice forming the letters independently.

In addition to using a white board or paper, there are also a variety of Android and Apple Apps that can be used to practice tracing and writing letters. Using technology can be an excellent way to engage children in their learning. Some of the Apps to practice tracing letters include:

Little Writer-The Tracing App for Kids, ABC Letter Tracing, Pre-K Letters and Numbers, Letter Tracing, Amazing Letters & Numbers - Interactive Writing Game for Kids

Activity 11: Word Sort

Word Sort is an activity that can be used to help children practice recognizing letters. This activity can be done using a variety of words such as names that are familiar to the child, common household items, foods, games, sports, etc.

HOW TO DO Word Sort:

Word Sort can be done in three different ways. Part 1, Part 2, and Part 3 of the activity are described below:

PART 1:

- The parent writes out a variety of words on strips of paper and places the words in an envelope.
- The parent gives the envelope to the child.
- The child's goal is to sort the words so that words with the same first letter are all grouped together.
- The child writes the letter that fits with that group of words on a separate sheet of paper and places it with the words.

Word Sort:

- Allows children time to practice sorting words by referring to the first letter of the word.
- Assists children in being able to recognize words with similar first letters and the number of letters included in words.
- Provides children with the opportunity to build words using the letters provided.

EXAMPLE: Jenna, Jake, and Jason would be placed under "J," Stephanie and Scott would be placed under "S," Matt would be placed under "M," and Rebecca and Ryan would be placed under "R."

PART 2:

- The parent cuts up the words, letter-by-letter, and places the letters of each word in an envelope.
- The word is written on the front of the envelope.
- The child's goal is to re-create the word on the envelope using the letters in the envelope. If the child needs additional support when recreating the word, he/she can refer to the word on the envelope as a guide; otherwise the child reads the

word on the envelope and then re-creates the word using only the letters in the envelope.

EXAMPLE: The child reads BALL on the front of the envelope and rearranges the letters L, B, L, A to spell BALL.

PART 3:

- The parent writes out the various words on strips of paper as well as numbers ranging from 2–6 (or more depending on the length of words) and places the words in an envelope.

- The parent gives the envelope to the child.

- The child's goal is to sort the words according to the number of letters in the words. Words with the same number of letters will be placed together in a group under the appropriate number (indicating the number of letters in the words).

EXAMPLE: Mark, Jess, Jeff, and Kate would be placed under number 4; Liz and Ali would be placed under number 3; and Steph, Laura, Sarah, and Megan would be placed under number 5.

(Adapted from Trehearne et al., 2005)

Activity 12: I Spy Letters

I Spy Letters is an activity that can be done with children once they have learned all of the 26 letters of the alphabet. This activity can take place in a variety of settings including in the child's home (kitchen, family room, child's room, bathroom, etc.), in the car, in the library, in the mall, in the grocery story, at the park, etc.

HOW TO DO I Spy Letters:

- The parent begins by looking around the room/area and mentally choosing one object.
    - EXAMPLE: The parent chooses a chair.
- The parent says "I spy with my little eye, something that begins with the letter ____."
    - EXAMPLE: I spy with my little eye, something that begins with the letter "C."
- The child's role is to look around the room/area and identify the object that begins with the letter that the parent chose. When the child finds the object he/she says the name of the object and the letter that the object begins with.
    - EXAMPLE: A chair. Chair begins with the letter "C."

Note: Depending on the child's confidence and abilities, it is acceptable if the child identifies a different object that begins with the same letter.

I Spy Letters

- Allows children to learn that letters are used to make words.
- Children are able to make associations between letter names and objects around them that begin with the letter.
- Provides children with an opportunity to apply their knowledge of the alphabet letters in an interactive activity.
- The focus of the activity is for the child to identify the letters and objects around him/her that begin with specific letters.

HOW TO MODIFY I Spy Letters to incorporate flash cards:

I Spy Letters can be modified to include the use of flash cards in a fun and interactive way. This modification is most easily done at home as opposed to the original activity above that can be done in a variety of settings.

- The parent writes out each letter on an individual piece of paper (purchased flash cards can also be used in this activity).

- The parent places the flash cards all around the room. The cards should be placed in a manner so that the child is required to look around for the cards, but so that they can be located without too much difficulty.

  Note: The parent can use as many or as few letters as he or she thinks is appropriate for the child. The parent may want to begin by using only 5 to 10 letters. Once the child is comfortable, the parent can use all 26 letters in this activity.

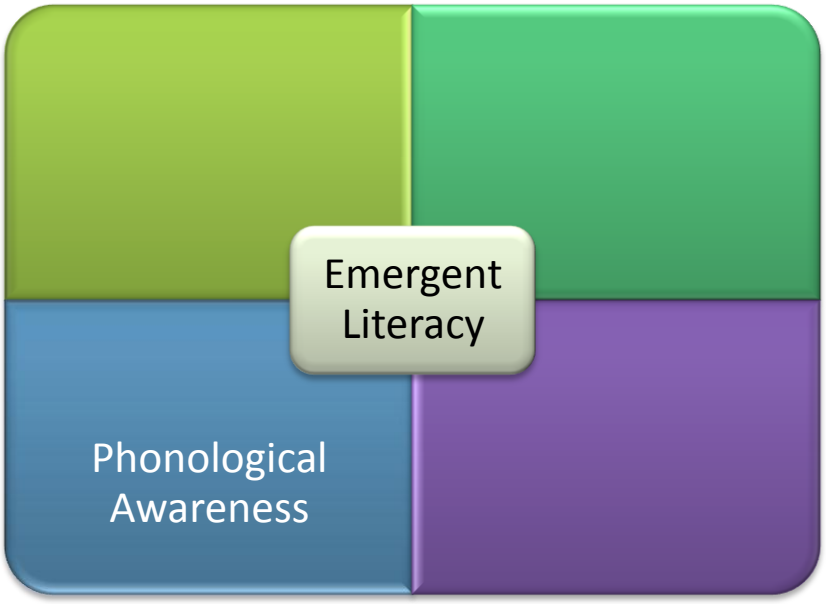
- Once the cards are dispersed around the room, the parent says, "I spy with my little eye the letter ____."

  - EXAMPLE: I spy with my little eye the letter "J."

- The child's role is to look around the room, find the letter, bring it to the parent, and say the letter out loud.

- The activity continues as the parent continues to "spy" the different letters around the room.

Activities to Develop Phonological Awareness



Activity 1: Shared Reading

Reading books with children is a great way to begin developing their phonological awareness at an early age. Before focusing on various phonological awareness skills, it is important that the child is familiar with the story and knows what the story says. Reading and re-reading the stories allows the child to have time to process the story line and words in the story, preparing them to be able to begin focusing on the phonological awareness skills. Once the story has been read multiple times, the parent can begin to guide the child to consider the words, rhymes, syllables, and sounds found throughout the story.

HOW TO USE Shared Reading to develop phonological awareness at the *word level, rhyme level, syllable level,* and *sound level:*

Word Awareness:

- Have the child (or parent) point to each word as it is read so the child can develop an awareness of the individual words found in stories.

- Create a chant from a section of the story. Have the child sing the chant while also clapping, stomping, or tapping along with every word.

Rhyme Awareness:

- Point out two rhyming words in the story. Explain that they rhyme because have the same sound at the end of the word. Brainstorm with the child other words that rhyme with the two words, emphasizing the ending sound of the words.

- When coming across a page with rhyming words, begin by first reading the words normally. Pause the story and ask the child to listen carefully, then read the sentence with the rhyming words again. Say one of the rhyming words from the sentence and ask the child to identify/say the other word in the sentence that rhymes with the word.

Shared Reading:

- The interaction that occurs between a parent and child when they are reading or looking at a book together.
- An activity that can be used to assist in the development of phonological awareness skills at the word level, rhyme level, syllable level, and sound level.
- Active engagement and involvement in the book reading by the parent and child is essential.

Syllable Awareness:

- Pause the reading to focus on multisyllable words. Highlight that the word has more than one beat (syllable), but that is still considered to be one word (EXAMPLE: apple = a·pple, baby = ba·by, computer = com·put·er). Have the child clap or tap the syllables that he/she hears in the words.

- Pause the reading to focus on one sentence from the book. Read the page and point out one word that has one syllable in it. Clap or tap the syllable while reading the word (ensuring to emphasize the beat). Ask the child to listen for another word with only one syllable while the parent rereads the sentence. Have the child identify the words with one syllable. Go through the same process for the words that have two and three syllables.
  (EXAMPLE: *DOG* is the word with one syllable, and the child may say the word *THE* as another word with one syllable from the sentence).

Sound Awareness:

- Before reading, look at the title of the book. Point to the first letter of the word(s) in the title. Ask the child to identify what the letter is and what sound the letter makes. If the child says the incorrect sound then the parent reads the title out loud to the child, and asks the child to identify what sound was made by the first letter.

- While reading the book, pause and point to specific words on a page. Ask the child to say the sound that is made by the first letter in the words. If the child can successfully identify the sounds ask him or her to think of other words that begin with the same sound.

- Read a page/sentence from the book. Pause the reading and ask the child to listen carefully to the words being read. Read two or three words that begin with the same sound from that page/sentence (EXAMPLE: house, hand, happy). Ask the child to say the sound that is common between these three words.

- While reading a story with the child, pick one page or sentence to focus on. Substitute the first consonant sound with a new sound. For example, *Bobby loves eating popcorn for snack* would become *Wobby woves eating wopcorn wor wnack* by changing the consonants to **w**, or *Hobby hoves eating hopcorn hor hnack* by changing the consonants to **h.** After the parent reads the sentence with the new sounds, ask the child to identify what the common sound was between all of the words.

(Adapted from Ezell & Justice, 2005; Trehearne et al., 2005)

Activity 2: Mirror Mirror

Mirror Mirror is an activity that children can participate in to be introduced to the concept of syllables. This activity requires the use of a handheld mirror or large mirror.

HOW TO DO Mirror Mirror:

- The parent begins by explaining that words are divided into syllables or beats. Every syllable consists of a vowel (a, e, i, o, u, and sometimes y) and often consonants (the remaining letters of the alphabet that are not vowels) either before or after the vowel.
- The parent explains that you can tell how many syllables are in words by watching yourself say the word in the mirror. Every time your mouth opens, you are saying one syllable.
- The parent will model this by clearly and slowly saying a word while looking into the mirror. The parent asks the child how many times his or her mouth opened when saying the word. The parent repeats the word, distinctly emphasizing the syllables. The parent has the child repeat the same word while watching himself/herself say the word in the mirror.
    - EXAMPLE: The parent says the word *banana*. The child notices that the parent's mouth opened three times while saying the word. The parent repeats the word, *ba-na-na*. The child says *banana* while looking into the mirror.
- After the child has seen the parent model a few words while looking in the mirror, the child will do the activity independently. The parent will give the child a word to say, and the child will repeat the word while watching himself or herself say the word in the mirror. The child will then tell the parent how many syllables are in the word based on how many times he or she opened his or her mouth.
    - EXAMPLE: Monkey. The child says *mon-key* while looking in the mirror. The child sees that his/her mouth opens twice, so there are two syllables in the word monkey.

(Adapted from Busy Teacher, 2012)

Mirror Mirror:

- An activity that can be used to assist in the development of phonological awareness skills at the syllable level.
- An interactive way for children to understand what syllables are and how they are formed.
- Allows children to see that as they are saying a word their mouth opens with every vowel sound. This means that every time a child's mouth opens he/she is saying a syllable.

Activity 3: Word Counter

Word Counter is an activity that can be done after reading a book or at any point during the day. If the activity is done after reading a book, the parent will choose a page, sentence, or phrase from the book to focus on. Otherwise, the parent can choose a short sentence or phrase about any topic to use for the activity.

HOW TO DO Word Counter:

- The parent writes the sentence or phrase on the Word Counter Sheet provided, ensuring to write one word in each of the boxes in the word section of the table.
- Once the sentence is written, the parent will give the child a marker, bingo dabber, or crayon. This will be used to mark and count the words in the sentence.
- The parent asks the child to listen carefully to the words in the sentence. The parent reads the sentence out loud to the child, ensuring to emphasize every individual word in the sentence.
- The parent reads the sentence a second time to the child. This time the child's role is to be the "word counter." The child uses the bingo dabber, marker, or crayon to make a mark or circle under each word in the counter section of the table as they hear the words read by the parent. At the end of the sentence, the parent asks the child how many words were in the sentence. The child will count the number of marks made to help count the words in the sentence.
- Repeat the activity using different sentences. Each time the child will make a mark in the counter section of the table as the words are read, helping to count the number of words in the sentence.

Word Counter:

- An activity that can be used to assist in the development of phonological awareness skills at the word level.
- Allows children to recognize that there are individual words in phrases or sentences.
- Provides children with a visual reference to help in the comprehension that letters are put together to create words.

EXAMPLE:
As the parent reads the words in the sentence (the boy ate two cookies), the child make a mark in the counter section when each word is read. In this example there are five words, so the child makes five marks; each mark is made as the child hears the individual words being read. When the parent asks the child how many words are in the sentence, the child counts the marks made in the table and answers that there are five words in the sentence.

(Adapted from Trehearne et al., 2005)

Word Counter Example:

Words	THE	BOY	ATE	TWO	COOKIES
Counter					

Word Counter Template

Words					
Counter					

Words					
Counter					

Words					
Counter					

Activity 4: Sentence Chop

Sentence Chop is an activity that can be done after reading a familiar story with the child. This activity can also be done using familiar everyday phrases or sentences instead of those from a book. It is suggested that the parent begins with simple sentences. Once the child masters the activity with simple sentences, longer sentences can be introduced.

HOW TO DO Sentence Chop:

- The parent chooses a sentence (either from everyday talk or from a familiar story) and writes it twice on a strip of paper.

  EXAMPLE:

The bird builds a nest.

The bird builds a nest.

- The parent asks the child to point to each of the words in the first sentence. The parent cuts up the second sentence (identical to the first) into individual words.

  EXAMPLE:

The bird builds a nest.

The	bird	builds	a	nest.

- The parent puts the words in a pile.
  The child's role is to look at the individual words and re-create the original sentence using the cut up words. The child can refer to the original sentence as a model to use to rebuild the sentence.

  An extension to make this activity more challenging would be for the child to re-create the sentence by listening to the words read by the parent instead of looking at the model sentence and matching the words in the correct order.

Sentence Chop:

- An activity that can be used to assist in the development of phonological awareness skills at the word level.
- Allows children to recognize that there are individual words in phrases or sentences.
- Provides children with a visual example of the concept that sentences are made of words.
- Provides children with an opportunity to put words together to create a sentence.

(Adapted from Trehearne et al., 2005)

Activity 5: The Odd Ball

The Odd Ball is an activity that requires the use of a sheet of paper and a pencil or a white board and white board markers. The whiteboard is simply an easier way to write and erase words without wasting paper. The goal of the activity is for the child to determine the word that does not rhyme with the other two words. This word that does not rhyme is the odd ball.

HOW TO DO The Odd Ball:

- The parent writes three words on the white board/paper.
  - Two of the three words must rhyme and the third word must not rhyme.
  - EXAMPLE: toy boy rat
- The child is asked to identify which of the three words is the odd ball (does not rhyme with the other words).
  - EXAMPLE:

toy	boy	rat	(**rat** does not rhyme)
dog	cup	fog	(**cup** does not rhyme)
mop	lake	cake	(**mop** does not rhyme)
eat	pie	meat	(**pie** does not rhyme)

HOW TO MODIFY The Odd Ball:

As the children masters the activity, the parent can increase the difficulty by using words that have one or two similar beginning sounds. The child's role is to identify the rhyming word without getting distracted by the other similar sounds in the words. The child should be reminded to always focus on the end of the word to determine if the words rhyme or not.

EXAMPLE:

- *man - cup* (there are no similar sounds - the words do not rhyme)
- *man - milk* (there is 1 similar sound - **m**an and **m**ilk, but the words do not rhyme)
- *man - map* (there are 2 similar sounds - **ma**n and **ma**p, but the words do not rhyme)

(Adapted from Trehearne et al., 2005)

The Odd Ball:

- An activity that can be used to assist in the development of phonological awareness skills at the rhyme level.
- Allows children to practice identifying words that rhyme.
- Allows children to have an opportunity to determine the word that does not rhyme with other words in the activity.
- Rhyming words are identified because they have the same sound at the end of the word (i.e., *hat* rhymes with *cat* - both words have the *at* sound at the end of the word).

Activity 6: Rhyme Time

Rhyme Time is an rhyming activity that parents can do with children outside of the home. There are no materials needed for this activity, making it easy to do in the car, in the grocery store, while on a walk, in the mall, etc.

HOW TO DO Rhyme Time:

- The parent begins the activity by saying a word that relates to the place they are in or an object that they can see around them.
    - EXAMPLE: While driving in the car the parent says the word *bike.*
- The child's role is to say a word that rhymes with the original word said by the parent.
    - EXAMPLE: The child says the word *Mike* to rhyme with *bike.*
- The activity continues back and forth between the parent and child, saying words that rhyme with the original word. Making up nonsense words may be a beneficial way to continue the rhymes when all of the real words have been said already. If the child gets stuck on a word the parent can help the child to create a nonsense word (add any beginning sound to a word, ensuring that the ending of the word is the same as the original word).
    - EXAMPLE: Other possible rhyming words include tike, hike, like, pike, etc.
- Once all the rhyming words have been said a new word can be chosen from the environment around the parent and child. The parent and child can alternate between who chooses the first word.

This activity can also be done using a ball. The parent begins by holding the ball and saying a simple word. The parent throws the ball to the child. The child's job is to catch the ball and say a word that rhymes with the original word. The child and parent continue to pass the ball back and forth, saying as many rhyming words as possible.

Rhyme Time:

- An activity that can be used to assist in the development of phonological awareness skills at the rhyme level.
- Provides children with an opportunity to practice rhyming words.
- Allows children to build vocabulary from the world around them while also creating rhyming words in a real-life context.
- Child can learn to generate rhymes from a variety of real words and nonsense words (words that do not have a real meaning or definition).

Activity 7: Rhyme Riddles

Rhyme Riddles is an activity that can be done either on paper or orally. Using paper and a pencil to write the rhymes is a good way to begin the activity. Once the child becomes more comfortable with Rhyme Riddles the parent can begin to say the rhyming riddles orally instead of writing them on paper.

HOW TO DO Rhyme Riddles:

- The parent comes up with a simple riddle that is one sentence or phrase long, and either writes it on paper or says it orally to the child. The riddle should contain a word in the middle of the sentence that rhymes with the last word of the sentence.
  - EXAMPLE: The cat is very fat.
- The parent asks the child to point out the two words in the sentence that rhyme.
  - EXAMPLE: **Cat** rhymes with **fat**.
- Once the child has identified the rhyming words the next part of the activity is to create other riddles that rhyme with the original rhyming word.
  - EXAMPLE:
    The cat is very fat → The **cat** sits on a **mat**
    → The **cat** sees a **bat**
    → The **cat** chases a **rat**
    → The **cat** runs over to **Pat**
    → The **cat** wears a red **hat**
    → The **cat** falls and goes **splat**
- After completing the Rhyme Riddle, the parent can choose additional riddles to use for the activity. Some examples of riddles that can be used include: the silly **goat** was wearing a **coat**, I saw the **bee** fly into my **tea**, the **pig** grew very **big**, the **dog** sat on a **log**, etc.

Rhyme Riddles:

- An activity that can be used to assist in the development of phonological awareness skills at the rhyme level.
- Allows children to continue practice generating rhyming words in an engaging way.
- Allows children to practice putting rhyming words into a sentence wth other words.

(Adapted from Trehearne et al., 2005)

Activity 8: Picture Rhyme

Picture Rhyme is an activity that is best done with the use of a whiteboard and whiteboard markers, or paper and markers.

HOW TO DO Picture Rhyme:

- The parent begins the activity by drawing a picture of a word. It is beneficial to begin with a picture of a simple word. Pictures used to represent longer or more challenging words can be used once the child has mastered the more simple words.
  - EXAMPLE: The parent draws a picture of a *sock*.
- The child's job is to guess the word that the picture represents.
  - EXAMPLE: The child sees the picture and guesses that it is a *sock*.
- Once the child guesses the correct word that describes the picture, the child must think of a word that rhymes with the original word. The child will draw an image of the rhyming word on the paper/whiteboard.
  - EXAMPLE: The child decides that *rock* rhymes with *sock*, so the child draws a picture of a *rock*.
- The parent guesses what picture the child has drawn, in turn guessing the rhyming word that the child chose to rhyme with the original word.
  - EXAMPLE: This is a picture of a *rock*. *Rock* rhymes with *sock*.
- Once the rhyming word has been guessed the parent asks the child to explain why the two words rhyme.
  - EXAMPLE: *Rock* rhymes with *sock* because both of the words end with s*ock*.
- After the discussion about the words, the parent or child begins another round of the activity by drawing a new image. The same process from above occurs during each round of Picture Rhyme.

Picture Rhyme:

- An activity that can be used to assist in the development of phonological awareness skills at the rhyme level.
- Allows children to continue practicing generating rhyming words in an engaging way.
- Allows children to make associations between the rhyming words and a visual representation of the words.

Activity 9: It's In The Bag

It's In The Bag is a simple activity that can be used to practice identifying syllables in words. A bag or hat is needed to hold the objects for the activity.

HOW TO DO It's In The Bag:

- The parent places a variety of objects into a bag and explains to the child that he or she will be identifying the syllables in the words from the bag.
- The child's role is to pull out an object from the bag, identify the object, and then tap or clap the number of syllables that are in the word.
    - EXAMPLE: The child pulls an eraser out of the bag and identifies that it is an eraser. The child says the word eraser while tapping the three syllables: e-ras-er.

It's In The Bag:

- An activity that can be used to assist in the development of phonological awareness skills at the syllable level.
- An engaging way for children to practice identifying and tapping the number of syllables in words.
- The number of syllables in a word can be found by counting the number of beats in the word. A syllable usually consists of a vowel and optional consonant before and/or after the vowel.

HOW TO ADAPT It's In The Bag to be used in a variety of settings:

- While packing on a trip, count the syllables of all the items that get placed into the suitcase.
- Count the syllables while the child packs or unpacks his or her daycare bag.
- While at the grocery story, count the syllables of the items placed in the cart.
- While parents are cooking in the kitchen the child can count the number of syllables in the ingredients being used for the recipe.

(Adapted from Trehearne et al., 2005)

Activity 10: Sound Twins

Sound Twins is an activity that gets children thinking about the sounds that are in words. This activity can be done using a variety of different sounds. It is important to emphasize that the focus is on the sound that is made and not the name of the letter itself.

HOW TO DO Sound Twins:

- The parent begins the activity by saying one word to the child. The word can be taken from a book that was recently read, or any word that the child knows. During the activity the parent should stress the sound made by the first letter of the word. The parent can also say the individual sound made by the first letter to help the child focus on the sound.
    - EXAMPLE: The parents says the word *house*, emphasizing the /h/ sound.
- The child's job to say one word that begins with the same sound as the sound made by the first letter in the original word.
    - EXAMPLE: The parent says the word *house,* and the child says the word *hot* because they both begin with the /h/ sound.
- The activity continues as the parent and child alternate saying words that begin with the same sound as the original word. If the child gets stuck trying to think of a word, the parent can repeat the sound to the child and provide assistance to generate a word if necessary.

Sound Twins:

- An activity that can be used to assist in the development of phonological awareness skills at the sound level.
- Allows children to practice recognizing similar sounds in words and generating additional words with the same sound.

HOW TO MODIFY Sound Twins:

As the child gets more comfortable with the activity the parent can make it more challenging by focusing on the end sound in the word instead of the beginning sound. The activity would be the same except that the words must all end with the same sound.

- EXAMPLE: The parent says the word *rat,* and the child says the word *hat* because both of the words end with the /t/ sound.

Activity 11: Swinging Sounds

Swinging Sounds is an activity that parents can do with children while playing on the swings in the backyard or at the park. The parent explains that the goal of the activity is for the child to guess the parent's mystery word.

HOW TO DO Swinging Sounds:

- The parent begins the activity by pushing the child on the swing. The parent chooses a simple word that he or she wants the child to identify (Begin with 2 or 3 letter words).
  - EXAMPLE: The parent chooses the word CAT.
- The parent's role is to say an individual sound from the word every time the child swings towards the parent. As the child swings away from the parent, the child's role is to orally repeat the sound.
  - EXAMPLE: As the child swings towards the parent, the parent says the sound /c/. The child repeats the sound /c/ as he or she swings away from the parent. Next, the parent says the sound /a/ as the child swings towards the parent, and the child repeats the sound /a/ when swinging away from the parent. Finally, as the child swings towards the parent, the parent says the sound /t/, and the child repeats the sound /t/ as the child swings away from the parent.
- Once all of the sounds have been said out loud by the parent and repeated by the child, the child is asked to blend the sounds together in order to guess the mystery word.
  - EXAMPLE: The child blends the sounds /c/, /a/, /t/ together and is able to identify that the sounds make the word CAT.

Swinging Sounds:

- An activity that can be used to assist in the development of phonological awareness skills at the sound level.
- Parents model the correct pronounciation of various sounds and children are able to practice identifying and repeating the sounds.
- Children practice blending the sounds to identify the word that is created by the individual sounds.

The activity can increase in difficulty as the parent chooses longer mystery words for the child to identify. The difficulty should be increased only when the child is confident in identifying the sounds and successfully blending the sounds together.

(Adapted from an idea from a teacher participant in the research project, Robinson, 2013)

Activity 12: What's That Sound?

What's That Sound? is an activity that can be used to help children learn to recognize similar sounds in words. Pictures are used in this activity to represent a variety of words. Pictures can be found from the internet, cut out from magazines and newspapers, or the parent can simply draw the pictures by hand.

HOW TO DO What's That Sound?

- The parent begins the activity by showing the child three pictures of words. Each of the words begin with the same sound.
    - EXAMPLE: Pictures of a ring, a roof, rain.
- The child's role is to look at the three pictures, say the word that each picture represents, and then guess the common sound that the three words begin with.
    - EXAMPLE: The three words are ring, roof, and rain. The common sound in the three words is the /r/ sound.

What's That Sound?:

- An activity that can be used to assist in the development of phonological awareness skills at the sound level.
- Allows children to practice recognizing similar sounds in words in an engaging way.

HOW TO MODIFY What's That Sound?:

- Once the child is able to identify the common sound between the three words, the activity can also be modified to increase difficulty. The parent shows three words to the child, except this time two of the words have the same sound and the third word has a different sound.
    - EXAMPLE: Tree, foot, train.
- The child's role is to identify the words that are represented by the pictures, and identify which word does not have the same sound as the other two words. Once the child has identified the word that has the different sound he/she says the two sounds out loud to demonstrate that they are not the same.
    - EXAMPLE: The three words are tree, foot, and train. Foot does not have the same sound as tree and train. Foot begins with the sound /f/, but tree and train begin with the sound /t/.

(Adapted from Trehearne et al., 2005)

Activity 13: Sound Sort

Sound Sort is an activity that children can participate in to work on recognizing different sounds and being able to sort words according to their sounds. The parent prepares for the activity by cutting up the individual words provided on the following page.

- NOTE: Depending on the child's abilities, the parent may want to begin by including 5–10 words in the activity. If the child is able to sort all of those words, then more words can be added to increase the difficulty.

HOW TO DO Sound Sort:

- It is suggested that parents begin the activity by including words from only one or two different sounds. Once the child can successfully sort the words into one or two sound groups, the parent can introduce third and fourth sounds.

Sound Sort:

- An activity that can be used to assist in the development of phonological awareness skills at the sound level.
- Allows children to practice recognizing and distinguishing between different sounds in an interactive and hands-on activity.

- Once the words are cut up, the parent places the words into an envelope or bag.
- The child's role in the activity is to pull the words out of the envelope or bag, read the words, and sort the words by placing them in groups based on the first sound in each word. All words with the same sound should be placed in the same group. After the child sorts the words, he or she identifies the beginning sounds used to sort the words. If appropriate for the child's level, the activity could also be done focusing on sorting the words according to the ending sounds instead of the beginning sounds.
    - EXAMPLE: The child places the words *he, her, high* into one group because they all have the beginning sound /h/, and the child places he words *free, fall, fun* into another group because they all have the beginning sound /f/.
- If the child requires assistance, the parent can help by reading the word out loud to the child, emphasizing the beginning sound in the word. After the parent reads the word, the parent encourages the child to repeat the word, putting the same emphasis on the first sound in the word.

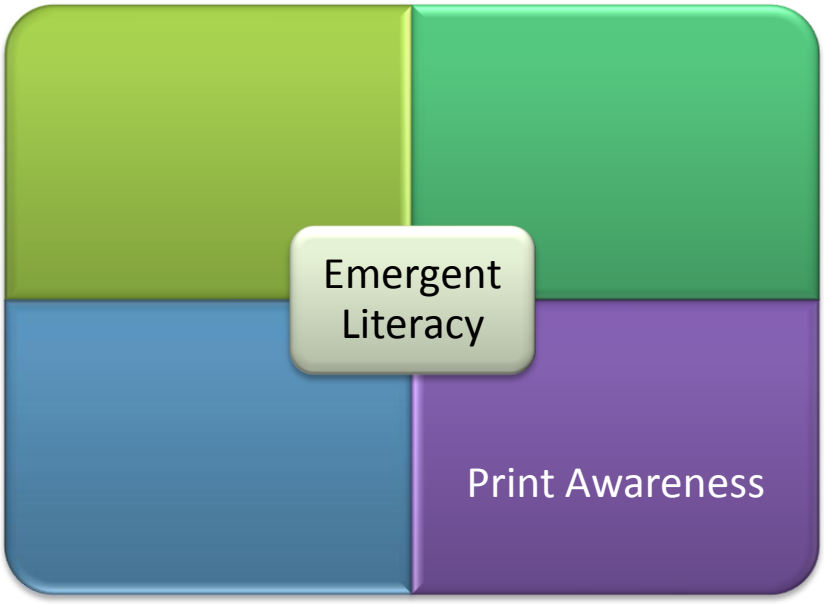
Refer to the following page for a list of words that can be used with Sound Sort.

(Adapted from Trehearne et al., 2005)

Sound Sort: Sample Words

DOG	CAT	NICE
LOG	HELP	BOOK
SHE	LOW	RING
HAT	SAND	ART
LAKE	AGE	RED
APPLE	FOOD	DIRT
REST	TOE	COW
HIM	FUN	GO
THE	NAIL	BAG
HIKE	TIME	SING
TREE	ROOF	HE
RING	GREEN	NEW
CROW	SUN	DRY

Activities to Develop Print Awareness



Print Awareness:
What Children Need To Know

Print Awareness is a skill that is very important for children to begin developing in their preschool years. Developing an awareness about various concepts related to print and books is an important contributor of emergent literacy. The following tables highlight the important concepts to teach children related to print awareness. It is these concepts that should be the focus of instruction during the print awareness activities:

- Concepts about the book elements
- Concepts about handling books
- Concepts about print
- Concepts about the types of texts
- Concepts about parts of a story

Concepts about the book elements to discuss with children:

- Cover - Explain that the cover contains the author, illustrator, title. The cover marks the start of the book.
- Author - Look at the author's name and explain that this is the person who wrote the book.
- Illustrator - Look at the illustrator's name and explain that this is the person who created the pictures in the book.
- Title - Read the title, discuss the number of words, what the words mean, and predictions about what may happen in the story based on the title.
- Table of Contents - Look at the Table of Contents and explain that this contains the written directions for what is included in the rest of the book.
- Illustrations - Look at various pictures in the book. Explain that the pictures relate to the words on the page. Discuss and make predictions about what is happening by looking at the pictures.
- Back Cover - Explain that this marks the end of the book.

Concepts about handling books to demonstrate to children:

- Books are intended to be used for reading.
- Hold the book with two hands, with the words facing upwards.
- Begin reading at the cover (front of the book) and end reading at the back cover (back of book).
- Begin reading the words at the top of the page and finish reading at the bottom of the page.
- Read from the left side of the page to the right side of the page. At the end of the line return back to the left side of the page and continue reading at the beginning of the next line.
- Gently flip the page when last word has been read on the page.
- Follows along by pointing as the words as they are read.

Concepts about print to discuss with children:

- Punctuation - Point out periods, commas, exclamation marks, question marks, and colons to children; explain how these marks have meaning that contributes to the meaning of the words or sentence.
- Sentence - Point out a sentence to the child; explain that a sentence contains a person or subject, and an action word that describes what that person is doing. A sentence ends with a period, question mark, or exclamation mark.
- First part and last part - Discuss that there is a first part and last part in every word, sentence, and story.
- Upper-case and lower-case letters -Explain that upper-case letters and lower-case letters are used for different purposes.
- Letter recognition - Discuss the importance of being able to identify the letters in books and make a connection between the letters and the sounds made by the letters.
- Words - Explain that the words in the book have meaning and carry the message in the book. Discuss the difference between letters, words, sentences, and pages. Explain that words (print) are spoken words that are written down.
- Spaces - Explain that the spaces between the words are important because they show where the words begin and end.

Concepts about types of texts to discuss with children:

- Fiction - Stories that are not real. The information or events are invented and made up.
- Non-Fiction - Stories that are real. The information, descriptions, and events in the story have happened in real life and are said to be factual or real.
- Poetry - Stories that use different techniques such as rhyme to add meaning to the story.
- Picture Books - Stories for young children that uses both pictures and words to tell the story.

Concepts about parts of a story to discuss with children:

- Characters - The people, animals, or subjects that the story is about.
- Setting - The time and place where the story takes place.
- Theme - The problem trying to be solved in the story or the goal that is trying to be reached in the story.
- Plot - The events that happen in the story.
- Sequence - the order of the story: beginning, middle, and ending.

(Lakeshore Learning, 2009; Reading Rockets, 2007; Wake County Public School System, 2007)

Activity 1: Read-Aloud

Read-alouds are valuable and meaningful activities that provide children with the opportunity to develop an awareness of print. An effective read-aloud must draw the child's attention to the various concepts associated with print awareness that were highlighted at the beginning of this section:

- Concepts about the book elements
- Concepts about handling books
- Concepts about print
- Concepts about the types of texts
- Concepts about parts of a story

Before the parent begins a read-aloud with the child, it is important that the parent decides which specific concepts of print awareness they will focus on during the reading. Not all of the concepts should be discussed during one read-aloud. Instead, choose a few concepts to emphasize.

The teaching and discussion associated with read-alouds occurs before, during, and after reading. Using print referencing is a beneficial way to teach children about print. The parent simply highlights and draws the child's attention to specific print features using verbal cues (such as asking questions and discussing print features) and non-verbal cues (such as pointing to print features).

Read-Aloud:

- The interaction that occurs when a parent reads a story out loud to the child.
- The parent plays a crucial role of modeling appropriate behaviours while reading.
- A reading activity that allows parents to model fluency, a variety of print concepts, the meaning that is found in print, and the connection between the pictures and words.
- Allows children to develop an awareness of print through listening to parents read.
- Print referencing is an excellent way to teach children about print concepts (Zucker et al., 2009).

HOW TO DO Read-Alouds:

Before reading:

- Remind the child to watch and listen carefully as you read the book aloud.
- Take time to highlight the features and elements of the book with the child (title, author, illustrator, cover, cover image, back cover, etc.).
- Discuss with the child the type of text that you are reading to him/her.

During the reading:

- Pay close attention to how you are handling the book as you read (reading the title, pointing to the words, turning the pages, determining where to begin and end reading on the pages, etc.). Remember that your child learns from observing your modelled behaviours.

- Encourage the child to follow the words while being read. This can be done by asking the child to point to every word with his/her finger while the words are being read. While focusing on the meaning or spelling of a specific word, the child can also "hug" the word between his or her pointer fingers to assist in staying focused on that particular word.

After reading:

- Ask the child to recall and discuss some of the parts of the story (characters, setting, plot, the problem, what happened in the beginning, middle and end of the story, etc.).

- Flip back to a few pages from the story to check the child's understanding of various print details.

    - EXAMPLES: Point to a word, count the number of words in this sentence, read the letters in this word, show me where you start reading on this page, ask where to go after you finish reading the line, point to the top of the page and the bottom of the page, point to the last word in the sentence, point to the first word on the page, go to the front of the book, point to the author, ask what the title of the book is, etc.

(Adapted from Reading Rockets, 2007; Wake County Public School System, 2007)

Activity 2: Shared Reading

Shared reading is an excellent activity that helps in developing children's print awareness. It is important to note that simply reading books to children is not enough to truly develop print awareness. Instead, it is essential for the parent to involve the child during shared reading by sparking discussions or asking questions about the print so that the child can demonstrate his or her understanding and awareness of print.

Shared reading is a beneficial and meaningful activity to use to teach print awareness, especially when the child is familiar with the story. Read the story with the child multiple times, pointing out small concepts surrounding print awareness. Once the child is familiar with the text, the parent can begin to put a greater focus on the instruction regarding the print concepts.

Similar to read-alouds, the focus of shared reading in this context should be on the concepts of print awareness:

- Concepts about the book elements
- Concepts about handling books
- Concepts about print
- Concepts about the types of texts
- Concepts about parts of a story

Shared Reading:

- The interaction that occurs between a parent and child when they are reading or looking at a book together.
- An instructional strategy that can be used to help children learn how to read by teaching about specific print concepts (Snow et al., 1998).
- Active engagement and involvement in the book reading by the parent and child is essential.
- Provides children with the opportunity to observe the parents model the appropriate behaviours while handling print.
- The interaction between the parent and child allows the parent to monitor and assess the child's awareness of print.

HOW TO USE Shared Reading to teach print concepts:

Before reading:

- Remind the child to watch and listen carefully as you read the book aloud.
- Take time to point out the features and elements of the book with the child (title, author, illustrator, cover, cover image, back cover, etc.).
    - Ask the child to explain the meaning of the various book elements in his/her own words.

- Discuss with the child the type of text that you are reading.
    - Bring up other similar types of texts that the child has read before so they can begin to understand the differences between the different types of texts.
- Encourage the child to make predictions about the text and share what they already know about the book topic.

During the reading:

- Have the child point to the place on the page where you will begin to read.
- After reaching the end of the line, ask the child where to continue reading next.
- Have the child be in charge of turning the pages.
- Take time to discuss the illustrations and how they relate to the meaning of the words.
- Focus on studying specific words throughout the story.
    - Have the child identify the letters in the word and discuss the meaning of the word.
- When coming across different types of punctuation take a moment to stop and discuss what the specific punctuation mark means (question mark, exclamation mark, period, etc.).
    - Discuss and ask how the story would change if a different punctuation mark was used.

After reading:

- Ask the child to recall and discuss some of the parts of the story (characters, setting, plot, the problem, what happened in the beginning, middle and end of the story, etc.).
- Flip back to various pages from the story to check the child's understanding of various print details.
    - EXAMPLE: Point to a word, count the number of words in this sentence, read the letters in this word, show me where you start reading on this page, where do you go after you finish reading this line, point to the top of the page and the

bottom of the page, point to the last word in the sentence, point to the first word on the page, go to the front of the book, point to the author, what is the title, etc.

- Introduce a word study involving some of the words from the book (new words or familiar words).
    - EXAMPLE: Talk about the letters that make up the word, have the child draw an image of the word, discuss the meaning of the word.

(Adapted from Ezell & Justice, 2005)

Activity 3: Book Talks

Book talks are great ways to teach children concepts about print awareness while introducing them to a new book.

The parent's role in this activity is to choose a couple of concepts of print awareness and introduce them to the child. It is very important that the parent has read the book multiple times and is comfortable with the content in the book before doing a book talk.

HOW TO DO A Book Talk:

- Present the child with a new book that has not been previously read.
- Discuss the book elements on the cover of the book (title, author, illustrator, images).
- Explain the type of text that is being used for the book talk and why it falls into that category of text.
    - Recall other texts that the child has previously read that fall under the same text category.
- Based on the title and images on the front, ask the child to make a prediction regarding what he or she thinks the book will be about.
- Provide the child with a short summary of the book.
    - Ensure that the summary includes words such as: characters, setting, time, events, beginning, middle, end, problem or theme, etc.
- Turn to specific pages in the book for a page study (ideally pages that have new words or interesting pictures).
    - Ask the child to identify where to begin reading on the page.

Book Talks:

- A way to introduce the child to new books while also teaching print awareness concepts.
- The parent takes on the active role in this activity, sharing information with the child.
- Upon completing a book talk, the parent can use the same book shortly after for shared reading.

- Read the words on the page to the child.
- Ask the child to look at the pictures, and talk about how the pictures relate to the words.
- Ask the child to identify new words that they hear or see on the page.
    - Discuss the new words and talk about their meaning, the letters in the word, how to sound out the word, and draw an image of the word.
- After completing the book talk the parent and child can read through the entire book together.

(Adapted from Trehearne et al., 2005)

Activity 4:
Encountering Environmental Print

Being able to read environmental print is an important factor involved in children's development of print awareness. Environmental print is the real-life application of print that is all around us: on store signs, advertisements, calendars, food packaging, road signs, menus, etc. Environmental print is the print of everyday life found in the form of symbols, signs, numbers, and various colours. Children not only see these symbols around them, but are able to read the symbols to figure out the meanings behind the symbols.

A variety of simple activities can be done with children to teach them about environmental print. These activities can be done in the home and outside of the home.

HOW TO TEACH ABOUT Environmental Print:

- While driving in the car, point out various road signs and store signs to children. Ask the child to describe the sign and then guess what the sign means or what it stands for.
    - EXAMPLE: The parent points to a stop sign. The child says that it is a red sign with white letters. It means that you must stop the car. OR The parent points to a railroad crossing sign. The child says that it is a white X shaped sign. It tells you that the train will cross the road here.
- While driving in the car, provide the child with the name of one or two restaurants, stores, or road rules. The child's goal is to be looking for the sign or symbol that is used to represent the specific word. When the child finds the appropriate sign or symbol, he or she tells the parent. Once the child has found the symbols, the parent gives the child one or two more restaurants, stores, or road rules to look for.
    - EXAMPLE: The parent says Tim Hortons and Target. The child tells the parent when he or she sees a Tim Hortons sign and a Target sign.

Environmental Print Activities:

- Provides children with the opportunity to practice identifying and creating meaning from the symbols, signs, and numbers they come in contact with in their daily life.
- Allow children to understand that print is everywhere, and having an awareness of print is an important skill in all areas of life.

- While at the grocery store, have the child look at the packaging of items that are put in the cart. Ask the child to identify what the item is, and point to the symbol, number, or image that is used to represent the item.
    - EXAMPLE: The parent puts crackers in the cart and the child points out that the crackers are Wheat Thins.

- While in the grocery store, the parent looks at the items on the list. When approaching the desired item, the parent will say the name of the item, and the child's job is to look on the shelf and find the symbol that relates to the food item.
    - EXAMPLE: The parent says KRAFT peanut butter, and the child looks at the shelf and has to point to the symbol that identifies KRAFT peanut butter.

- While at a restaurant, provide the child with a menu to look at. Ask the child to identify the symbols and images that are in the menu.
    - EXAMPLE: The child identifies the name of the restaurant on the cover, the different types of soda pops that are offered, the colours used on the menu, etc.

- While at home, provide the children with old newspapers, magazines, and empty cereal boxes. The child's role is to look through the items and identify the symbols (environmental print) that they can see. The parent cuts out the various symbols and the child creates a collage using the environmental print symbols. Once the collage is complete the child identifies what each of the symbols in the collage are and the meaning of the item that is represented by the symbol.

- Have the child create a grocery store. Provide the child with newspapers advertisements and coupons to use for pretend shopping. Have the child place the advertisements around the wall of the grocery story. Begin with the parent as the casher and the child as the customer. When the customer comes to buy food, have him or her point to the images and symbols that they want to buy. They must identify the item, based on the symbol, in order to be able to purchase the item.

- Provide the child with various food and clothing flyers. The child begins by circling the environmental print symbols that are found in the flyers. After the parent cuts out the symbols from the flyer, the child's job is to sort the symbols into three categories: the environmental print symbols that use only upper-case letters, those that use only lower-case letters, and those that use both upper-case and lower-case letters. After

sorting the symbols, the child glues them onto a sheet of paper based on the three different categories.

- Provide the child with food and clothing flyers. This time, the child's role is to look through the flyers and circle the environmental print that contains numbers. Once the child has circled the print containing numbers, the parent will cut out the images. The child then glues the environmental print number images onto a sheet of paper. The parent can point to the images and ask the child to identify the numbers that are used in the print.

- Provide the child with newspapers, food flyers, clothing flyers, magazines, and empty food boxes. Have the child identify the environmental print symbols that are contained in the various print items. After the parent cuts out the symbols, the child's job is to create a word wall for the environmental print. The paper or bulletin board will first be divided into 26 spaces, for the 26 letters of the alphabet. The parent and/or the child will write down one letter in each of the 26 sections. The child's role is to look at the environmental print words and symbols that have been cut out and place them under the alphabet letter that corresponds with the first letter of the word or symbol. The child can continue to add to the environmental print word wall as he/she comes across examples of environmental print on flyers, boxes, newspapers, etc.

    - EXAMPLE: A - Activia, B - Butter, C - Crispex, Cheerios, Crest, D - Dole, K - Kellogg's, V - Vector, Z - Ziploc, etc.

(Adapted from MacDonald, 2013)

Activity 5: Create Your Own Storybook

Creating a storybook with preschool children is an excellent way to apply their knowledge of the emergent literacy components, with a focus on print concepts.

Creating a storybook is a continuous project that the parent and child can work on together. Creating a storybook could take anywhere from a few weeks to multiple months to complete, depending on the length and depth of the story, as well as the time committed to the project. It is best for the parent to begin the project by choosing a deadline so that there is a goal for when the story will be completed.

It is recommended that parents set aside specific times each week to work on the story. This provides the child time to develop his/her ideas and time away from the project so that the child does not lose interest in the activity.

HOW TO Create Your Own Storybook:

- Explain to the child that you will be creating a story together. The child is the main author, and the parent is the supporting author.
- Ask the child to begin by telling a creative story.
    - Opening story prompts could be used if the child requires direction of how to start a story.
    - EXAMPLE: Once upon a time..., In a land far far away..., There once was..., etc.
- The parent records the child's story, word for word.
    - If there is a computer available, it would be most efficient to type the story because it will be further developed and edited throughout the project.

Create Your Own Storybook:

- A final culminating activity that children can complete together with their parents to demonstrate their knowledge of literacy skills.
- Allows children to combine and apply their knowledge of oral language, alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness and print awarenes into one activity
- Children are provided with the opportunity to feel like not only a successful reader, but also a successful author.

- After the child has told his or her story, the parent reads the original story back to the child.

- Discuss parts of a story with the child:

    - Title, characters (major and minor), setting (time and place), the problem, the theme, the solution, and the beginning, middle, and end of the story.

    - Choose one specific aspect of the story and ask the child to add more detail to help make the story more interesting for the audience to read.

        - EXAMPLE: describe the characters' appearance, how the characters met, what time of day the story is happening, describe where the story takes place - describe the different settings, explain the problem of the story and how the characters are involved in the problem, describe how the characters solve the problem, describe who is involved in the solution, describe how the story ends, etc.

- Reread the story to the child after any changes have been made. Ask the child if he/she likes the additions made to the story. The parent's role is to choose aspects of the story that should be further explained and encourage the child to explain and provide more detail about that part of the story.

- Once the parent and child have read the story many times, and the story includes enough detail to ensure that the story is engaging and makes sense, the writing phase is complete.

- Together the parent and child carefully read the words on the computer screen, looking for any spelling mistakes. When the parent comes across a spelling mistake he or she can sound the word out and ask the child to identify the letters of the word. This allows for the child to be involved in the editing phase of the story creating.

- Next, the parent and child work together to design the illustrations and images for the story.

    - If a camera is available, photographs can be taken of family members or friends that can play the role of the characters in the story. The parent can take pictures of the characters in different positions, according to what their character does in the story.

- EXAMPLE: If the girl in the story is eating dinner at the beginning of the story, the parent can take a picture of the child's friend sitting at the table. This will bring the story to life because the child is able to involve family and friends in the story.

- If the child prefers, he or she can also draw all of the illustrations and images of the characters using pencil crayons, crayons, markers, etc.

- The background of the illustrations can be created using cut-outs from magazines or newspapers. The child can also draw the backgrounds.

- Once the words of the story are finished and the illustrations have been created, the parent and child work together to assemble the story. Together they have to make sure that the illustrations match the words on the page.

- After the illustrations and words have been placed together, the parent and child can bind the story so that it is a real book.

- The child can create a cover and back cover of the book, while also ensuring to include the names of the authors, illustrators, and title on the cover.

- Once the story is complete, the child can read the book to parents and friends. The child can feel confident in his or her abilities as a successful reader and author through creating the story.

(Adapted from an idea from a parent participant in the research project, Robinson, 2013)

Government Resources

The following government documents are additional resources that can be used to gain more information about literacy development in the home environment:

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2001). *Helping your child learn to read: A parent's guide*. Toronto: Early Reading Strategy. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/brochure/earlyreading/readingguide.pdf

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Ontario Ministry of Education. (2012). *Reading and writing with your child, kindergarten to Grade 6: A parent guide.* Toronto: Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/parentGuideLit2012.pdf

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CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

As children enter school in kindergarten and grade 1, they begin to learn many new skills, abilities, behaviours, and competencies. Reading and literacy are two of the central skills that children learn and develop in kindergarten and grade 1. The classroom teacher has a great responsibility to provide an encouraging and effective learning environment to children in which they are able to develop these skills. However, the teacher is not the only person who has a responsibility to teach children early literacy and the development of reading skills. Parents have an equal responsibility in providing meaningful opportunities in the home environment where children can learn early literacy and reading skills before they begin school. Research has found that children are capable of developing an early foundation for literacy in their preschool years, and, through the participation in literacy and reading activities at home, children can begin to develop emergent language and literacy skills (Morrow, 2001).

The purpose of this research project was first to provide parents of preschool children with an awareness regarding the essential role that they play in assisting their children to develop early literacy and reading skills. The second purpose of this research project was to create a practical and valuable home literacy handbook for parents with preschool children. This handbook contains a variety of activities and lessons that parents can use to create a rich home literacy environment. The goal behind the development of the handbook was to provide parents with accessible and parent-friendly strategies to assist in developing their children's emergent literacy skills. The hope is that by providing parents with this handbook, children will be learning early literacy and reading skills at home so that they are prepared to some degree for the literacy programs in kindergarten

and grade 1. In the following section, I present a summary of the research project, a discussion of the findings, implications for practice, and suggestions for further research.

Summary of the Research Project

After reading a wealth of academic literature surrounding the topic of home literacy environments and emergent literacy, it was noted that the home environment, specifically the involvement of parents in the home environment, has a large influence on children's development of early literacy and reading skills (Burgess, 2011; Burgess et al., 2002; Haney & Hill, 2004; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Senechal et al., 1998; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). In addition to using academic literature to learn about the involvement of parents in the home literacy environment, the literature review also provided insights into the significant components of emergent literacy. Additionally, a needs assessment was conducted to gain more insight into the needs of relevant stakeholders in the project context. The needs assessment in this research project was conducted with both parents of preschool children and grade 1 and grade 2 teachers.

The purpose of doing the needs assessment was to hear from real parents and teachers about their perspectives and experiences with early literacy, their roles in the home literacy environment, and their ideas about what literacy development activities children can be doing at home during their preschool years. It also provided a voice to teachers and parents regarding home literacy in the preschool years. The needs assessment was conducted in two parts: through a written questionnaire sent via email for the grade 1 and grade 2 teachers and a planned focus group for the parents. Due to a difficulty in scheduling the focus group with the parents, the questions from the focus group were emailed to the parent participants in the format of a short-answer email

questionnaire. It was important that the parents and teachers participated in different needs assessments because they play different roles in children's literacy and reading development and both groups have unique perspectives to be heard. The researcher then analyzed questionnaire responses, categorizing them into common themes and major ideas. Distinct differences in the responses were also noted because they illustrated the diversity that occurs between different home literacy environments and the parents' individual needs.

Discussion

A Home Literacy Handbook for Parents with Preschool Children was created as a resource that parents can use in their home environment to help provide meaningful activities to their preschool children in order to assist in the children's early literacy and reading development. The literature emphasized that there are four major components that are associated with development of emergent literacy: oral language, alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and print awareness (Anthony et al., 2007; Flynn, 2011; Irwin et al., 2012; Lefebvre et al., 2011; Trehearne et al., 2005). The responses gathered from the teacher questionnaires affirmed this emergent literacy perspective found in the literature: Teachers, in accordance with the Ontario Curriculum, focus on oral language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and print awareness in the kindergarten, grade 1, and grade 2 classrooms. The responses gathered from the parents' needs assessments demonstrated that parents may be missing knowledge about some emergent literacy components. For example, most of the parents try to scratch the surface of teaching print concepts, but there are some specific aspects of print awareness that are not being taught. Similarly, the parents' responses demonstrated that there is more focus

placed on alphabet awareness than on phonological awareness in the home. Furthermore, while oral language is encouraged through discussions about books, there could be more focus placed on oral language through participation in a variety of other activities.

These findings from the needs assessment indicate that the parents in this project are attempting to provide opportunities for their children to learn early literacy and reading skills, but that all of the components of emergent literacy are not receiving the same emphasis. In addition, the various components could be taught by parents more explicitly and through a greater variety of creative and meaningful activities. This finding is important to consider because literature emphasizes that all four components of emergent literacy should be taught in order to fully develop emergent literacy. Therefore, based on the findings in relation to the information from the literature, it is clear that parents could definitely benefit from having access to a resource with examples of how to execute activities that develop oral language, alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and print awareness more effectively in the home.

Consistent with the literature and perspectives from current grade 1 and grade 2 teachers, the activities in the handbook were divided into the four components of emergent literacy: oral language, alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and print awareness. The activities included in each of the four sections allow for parents to teach the early literacy and reading skills to their children in creative, interactive, enjoyable, and meaningful ways. The variety of activities in the handbook should provide parents with choices to effectively teach and help develop their children's emergent literacy skills.

Implications

There are many implications that arise as an outcome of the development of *A Home Literacy Handbook for Parents with Preschool Children*. The implications are expressed through three different lenses: implications for practice, implications for theory, and implications for further research.

Implications for Practice

The handbook is applicable and beneficial for a variety of parents, preschool child care workers, and primary school teachers. While there are many parents who are able to provide a rich home literacy environment that emphasizes the development of literacy and reading skills to their preschool children, the reality is that there are also parents who do not have the resources, time, abilities, or knowledge to do so. The development of this home literacy handbook may help to meet the needs of parents who require assistance in providing a rich home literacy environment to their children. These parents will be able to choose a skill to focus on with their children and implement any of the practical activities in their own home. This handbook may also be used by parents who already emphasize literacy and reading in the home environment but desire to learn new and creative activities that can be used to teach early reading and literacy skills to their children.

This handbook is beneficial because it provides a means to teach all components of emergent literacy in a meaningful and practical way that should engage preschool children. For example, the first section of the handbook will help to provide parents and preschool child care workers with an understanding of emergent literacy and its components and the importance of the home literacy environment. In addition, the second

section of the handbook will provide parents, preschool child care workers, and primary teachers with practical activities that use easily accessible materials and games that can be used to help develop emergent literacy skills in preschool children.

In addition to using the handbook in the home environment, this handbook can also be used in a wider spectrum. First of all, the handbook could be available for use in both school libraries and local libraries. This would assist in allowing a greater population to have an opportunity to receive access to the activities provided in the handbook. Next, the handbook could be used as the foundation for a workshop for parents to help in providing them with practical ideas of how to create a rich home literacy environment where children have the opportunity to develop emergent literacy. The workshop could be done though individual schools, libraries, or as a program provided by school boards. In addition to workshops, the handbook could also be linked onto individual school websites or the greater school board websites so that all parents would have access to the handbook. All of these possible ways to adapt and use the handbook would allow for more parents to have access to the activities in order to, ultimately, allow more children opportunities to develop emergent literacy during their preschool years.

Implications for Theory

The creation of this practical handbook makes a significant contribution to the literature on emergent literacy for preschool children. A critique of theory is that it is often dissociated or distant from practice. In this project, the handbook is designed around four theoretical components of emergent literacy, and the practical activities are

directly linked to and explained in terms of the theory, thus promoting the direct link between theory and practice.

This research project also corroborates the value of the social constructivist theory, with a particular focus on Vygotsky's social constructivist theory. Vygotsky's theory emphasizes that knowledge is constructed when people interact with other people (Almasi & Garas-York, 2009). In addition, Vygotsky's theory emphasizes that children are able to maximize and further cultivate their learning when they are receiving supports from more knowledgeable adults in their zone of proximal development (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). This project illustrates how Vygotsky's theory is enacted in practice. Vygotsky's theory is demonstrated when considering the supports and assistance that parents provide to preschool children when teaching about reading and literacy skills. The results from the needs assessment demonstrated that while parents may not be teaching all of the components of emergent literacy, they are doing their best to read with their children and make literacy a part of everyday life. This is an important start as it demonstrates that parents are willing to be a part of their children's literacy and reading development. Parents' involvement in the home environment confirms the theoretical approach used as the basis for this research project: Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, with a particular focus on the theory of the zone of proximal development.

An important contribution of this research project is that it reinforces the critical role of parents as more knowledgeable peers and their role in knowledge construction. Besides teachers acting as the more knowledgeable peers in children's literacy development, this project shows that children benefit from learning emergent literacy skills alongside their parents in the home environment.

Implications for Further Research

Upon completing this research project, it is clear that there are multiple implications for future research based on limitations of the current project.

First of all, this research project utilized a small population of parent and teacher participants for the needs assessments. While the participants' participation and experiences were beneficial and valued in this project, a similar needs assessment should be conducted with a great number of participants. This would allow for more diverse perspectives to be heard and might identify a greater spectrum of needs. Including more participants in the needs assessment would therefore allow for the creation of an even more comprehensive handbook or resource that would be able to benefit an even wider parent audience.

Second, it would be beneficial in the future to conduct this needs assessment in a multicultural city where a variety of parents from different ethnic groups could be involved. This would allow for the researcher to gain insights into the specific needs that immigrant parents and families have that differ from the Canadian parents' needs—participants in this project were English-speaking Caucasians. In addition, conducting the needs assessment with parents that speak English as their second language would provide an additional set of needs that once again will differ from those of parents who speak English as their first language. Looking into these diverse groups would allow for the handbook to be more useful, accessible, and beneficial for an even greater audience.

Third, in the future it would be beneficial to involve fathers in the needs assessment for a project focusing on teaching emergent literacy in the home literacy environment. Hearing the fathers' perspectives on this topic would provide a different

view and assist in illustrating their own unique needs that differ from those of the mothers that participated in the needs assessment from this project. Involving fathers in the research project would also allow for a more comprehensive and all-encompassing view of the home literacy environment as a whole. The information gathered from the fathers would allow for the creation of a handbook that may help fathers feel comfortable using the activities with their children in the home environment.

Therefore, this research project opens the doors to a number of other areas related to home literacy and emergent literacy that could be studied further in the future.

Concluding Remarks

The overall goal of this research project was to develop a practical and parent-friendly home literacy handbook which can be used to assist parents in providing meaningful literacy and reading activities to their preschool children. The results from the needs assessments consolidated the information found in the academic literature and highlighted areas where parents could benefit from receiving additional support in helping their preschool children develop early literacy skills. It is my hope that this handbook will provide parents with engaging and practical activities that focus on building the four skill components associated with emergent literacy: oral language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and print awareness. It is through developing these four emergent literacy components in the home environment that preschool children can be prepared to a degree to meet the expectations of the literacy programs in kindergarten and grade 1.

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